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[PRICE TWOPENCE.]



[THERE, JUST BEHIND HER, WITH A LITTLE AMUSED SMILE ON HIS LIPS, STOOD THE STRANGER ARTIST.]

## SWEETHEART AND TRUE.

### CHAPTER I.

"Oh, mistress mine, where are you roaming?  
O, stay and hear; your true love's coming.  
Trip no further, pretty sweeting!  
Journey's end in lover's meeting,  
Every wise man's son doth know!"

THE beauty of an August noon lay over the land—mellow, sweet, and full of fragrance!

A stillness rested on all Nature, born of the tulling summer calm, and the rich, ripened languor of the waning noonday; that 'still' which summer alone sends to earth, broken only by the hum of insect life, the distant lowing of oxen, or the far-away chime of bells.

The sun-god still burnt in the heavens fiercely enough from the sapphire sky, for the noon had only just come and gone, and the cooler breath of evening was waiting to blow down from the amethyst hills its cooler soft-

ness on the little village of Pont l'Abbaye, nestling under the wooded heights and purple-crowned hills in complete Arcadian charm and simplicity, where surely nothing rough or harmful seemed as if it could reach one—past which, too, the lapping river went swirling by on its way to the sea, but three miles further on.

The waters had been running golden in the sun glare all the livelong day; now, slowly and evenly, great branching tree-shadows flung themselves lazily across the molten pathway, which, too, reflected back the woods and hills above.

Past the nestling, quiet village, and towards the distant sea, a little tangled-grown creek ran straight up from the river, hedged on either side with great water-weeds, rushes, drooping alders, and again old chestnut trees, which had seen years come and go amid no change, tranquilly unmindful of the flight of time.

At the junction of the creek and the river an old cumbersome, wherry-built, green-painted boat swung from a chain fastened to an iron staple driven deep into the bank.

A little roughly-made wooden landing-stage projected from the bank into the running stream, and close to the staple, so that one could easily step down from the wooden landing-place into the boat, free of the high-growing bulrushes and rank sedge grass lining the water side.

In all the beauty of the landscape; in the glory of this August noonday, the green-painted, cumbersome old boat, swinging in the stream, held the only visible living breathing souls—a girl and a dog!

The girl sat in the centre of the wherry, with her elbows planted on her knees, and her chin resting on her clasped hands, staring meditatively at the dog in front. He, sitting on his haunches, returned his mistress's gaze with a most perfect placidity of demeanour and expression, as if he rather enjoyed being stared out of countenance. His calmness, at any rate, showed that he did not resent the meditative stare.

And, indeed, there was no atom of reason why he should, for it was a very sweet face that looked so earnestly into his. Sweet, fresh, and full of youthful charm, what

more could anyone desire, be he human or canine?

Had she been on canvas one might have said, "Ah! a pastel of Latour's!" for she just looked like one of the great French painter's beautiful creations, garbed in a cambric gown, with a wide-brimmed Panama straw hat bent down over her eyes, and tied down under her chin by a faded blue ribbon. She had, too, fastened a little spray of wild hops and two fragrant pink oleander blooms in the front of her shady head-gear, which added the one touch of colour to an enchanting whole.

Beautiful as Latour's pastels invariably are, perhaps this living, breathing piece of human girlhood was more charming still.

As for the dog, he was a great big black Russian poodle, with half-shaven body, tail and legs, at the end of which had been left a little bushy tuft of black hair, like a small mop. This appendage he beat on the planks of the boat at odd times and seasons as occasion demanded affirmation, negation, or approval. Speech being denied him, he used his tail to express life emotion, pleasurable or otherwise.

He had been christened Zouave!

"Zouave," began the girl, thoughtfully, still gazing into the dog's placid face in front of her, "I do really and truly believe you are the only thing in all this wide world that loves me. It sounds rather a mournful sort of thing to say, I know; for all that it is true, I do believe, my dog."

Zouave stared up unblinkingly into his mistress's face as she uttered this profoundly melancholy sentiment. She was right; it did sound most mournful from her pretty red mouth. No doubt he thought so too, for if ever love looked out from living eyes, it certainly shone from his to hers, though they were but dog's eyes after all.

"I do love you dearly!" they said plainly enough in their own mute fashion; "dearly, faithfully, with all my dog's heart, to be with you wherever you may be, to come at your call, to your bidding if possible, watch and guard you, kiss your soft cool hand when you let me, and forsake you never, never, never! If this means love, then, indeed, I do truly love you, my sweet little mistress."

The girl read all this in his eyes well enough, but she went on almost wistfully.

"I wish you could say just yes or no, Zouave. I know you would, if it were possible, still I want to hear it spoken aloud in my own tongue. The language of the eyes does not altogether satisfy me. How very sweet it must be to hear a voice whisper quite softly, 'I love you, Olive!' Now, wouldn't it, my dog?" she ended, interrogatively.

The dog gave one short sharp bark, no doubt of assent. He felt his mistress was asking him some question of immense importance, which necessitated a reply. So he answered her with this one assenting bark.

"That means yes, of course. Well I suppose I must be content with your fashion of answering a question, since I cannot get any other. Half a loaf is better than none at all, and we cannot seemingly get all we want in this odd world we live in, neither you or I for that matter, so we must not expect it, that's all. Blessed is he or she, you know, Zouave, that expecteth nothing, for they won't be disappointed. I've learnt to expect nothing, and I find it much the best plan. I'm giving you good, sound, practical advice when I tell you *never expect*," and Olive nodded sagely, as she finished.

The dog remained immovable on his haunches, while his mistress harangued him thus quaintly. With slightly uplifted head he followed every movement of those rosy lips, as if anxious to lose not one single syllable of her utterance. No better listener could she possibly have.

"I firmly believe you understand everything I am speaking about, you dear old thing!" she went on softly. "Though you can only bark when I ask you a question, I am sure you know all I say. What clever dog

you are, Zouave, the very cleverest dog I ever met with in my life; not that this fact is any great criterion, I own," she put in with an uplifting of the white brows under her straw hat, "for my experience of things and people, including of course the canine species, is limited, very, very limited, indeed. I confess it; but then it is not my fault, only my great misfortune, and a tiresome one too. Still I know you are cleverer than most animals, including a good many men. I believe you could learn any mortal thing that one chose to teach you—all but one item, and that is speech. You could never learn to talk, more's the pity. If you only could but speak, you would be simply perfect, you darling old dog," ended Olive with an immense amount of honest conviction in her sweet voice.

Then she unclasped her hands from under her chin, and stretching out the two palms towards him, laid them gently on his soft hairy ears, holding his head upwards between them.

"What should I do without you, Zouave?" she murmured most tenderly. "Ah, what indeed? Tell me that if you can, but you cannot, because I could not do without you at all. I should have nothing to love, nothing to care for or think of, or confide in, the only friend, companion, I possess. Think of it. Some would call me poor to have no other. I don't grumble; you are enough for me. As for sweethearts, they are rather a mistake, it strikes me; a vast deal more trouble than they are worth. Perhaps I ought not to express my opinion so forcibly, because most girls would say I was wrong; but they are a mistake, Zouave, take my word for it. After all, what is a sweetheart? Nothing so much to be proud of, I'm sure," with a quaint comical expression on her red lips; "we don't want any sweethearts do we, old boy? I know I don't," she added, with some force.

Zouave wagged his tail slowly to and fro for the space of a full minute, beating it on the bottom of the boat after the manner of a miniature sail. I fancy his dog's mind was much exercised as to whether all this fervour proceeded from grief or joy, and he was not wishful to be completely wrong in his answer.

"My private opinion is that I shall never be married, for I shall never marry we know who, I'm very certain. I intend to be such a nice old spinster, and you'll be my faithful old love, won't you?" and again she kissed the rough head, forgetful for the moment that the span of a dog's life is but a short one, and that when age crept upon her Zouave would already be in his grave this many a year.

"What a splendid listener you are! You never interrupt, contradict, argue with me. I have it all my own way, and what I tell you you never repeat. I can confide all my deepest secrets—when I have any, which is seldom—into your old, sympathetic ear, and feel all the happier for my unburdening. Perhaps if I had a human friend I could not be so certain of their secrecy. My poor little secrets, such as they are, might be noised abroad on the wings of the wind when I least expected. But you are as silent as the grave on my confessions. Are you not?"

One single knock of the mop-tail gave evidence of complete affirmation.

"Come," then put in the girl, a little more briskly, "we really must not waste any more precious time. Or to be perfectly truthful, I must not waste any more time, otherwise poor old Nannette will not get her supper as we promised, and a promise is a sacred thing—no one should break it on any account whatever, say I. My tongue is an awful one to go on wagging. We will go at once, or we shall not be back before dusk."

As she finished the girl reached the long oars lying along the boat, and set them in the rowlocks ready for use.

"We shall not be long getting down stream, that's one comfort, and it will be much cooler by the time we come back. But heat or no heat, I would not disappoint Nannette for a

silver crown. It's sad to be old and ailing not able to enjoy life. Sometimes even I feel old somehow, though I am only twenty. In a few more years I shall be getting old. Yes; and so will you, my dog. Ah! don't die first, I beseech you. When you die I shall indeed feel alone—quite, quite alone!"

There was a sad ring in her voice at this moment infinitely pathetic—a kind of sweet monotone that was pleasant to listen to; and at the same time sorrowful. Pleasant because harmonious, though sad.

Then she leaned forward to loosen the chain from the ring that held the boat stationary in the swiftly running stream, and in doing so raised her head, glancing carelessly along the sedge-grown bank by the river. In that same moment she saw something which caused her evident astonishment, for she exclaimed, with quickened breath,—

"Zouave! look, there is someone coming along the bank from Pont l'Abbaye way. A stranger!"

Instinctively the dog turned his head in the direction of his mistress's eyes, and true enough someone was strolling leisurely along the waterside from the distant village. The someone was a man, and, as Olive herself said, "a stranger!"

He carried a small water-colour box and sketch-book in one hand, and the other held a cigarette half smoked. Every few paces he stopped his leisurely walk to look carefully about him, evidently trying from an artist's point of view to fix upon the best and likeliest place for a good sketch.

Now, the simple word "stranger" is always, more or less, one of interest to great and small alike. It quickens curiosity in a harmless degree, and excites at the same time a certain wonder in the mind of the beholder as to who, when, where, and what the same may be.

In Pont l'Abbaye this word constituted a phenomenon, because of its extreme rarity. Hence it caused a number of surprise that this girl felt a small titter of pleasant wonder at the advent of a strange someone on the river bank this August noon. It would not have been feigning human nature if she had not.

"An artist, Zouave, depend upon it!" she hazarded, in a low, communicative voice, noting the paint-box and sketch-book in his hand.

Zouave raised one ear stiffly erect, and looked again at the coming figure. He, too, evidently wondered, in his canine mind, who, when, where, and what, for it bore no similitude to those masculine figures which actually presented themselves hereabouts in this out-of-the-world Breton country place. He instinctively recognised the complete and vastness of the difference at once with true and unerring dog sagacity.

Here was no blouse, no sabots, no slouch hat, or faded berretta, such as the country round indulged in. The features, too, were not cast in the usual Breton mould.

Instead of these types and signs of the bucolic race, here was a man garbed as an English gentleman, whose clothes were unmistakably well cut, who wore them as an English gentleman, and whose face said plainly "true-born Briton."

Zouave put the other ear up as he noted all this, and then he glanced at his mistress, to see what she was going to say or do in the matter; whether converse was going to be held with this apparition, or whether he was to be regarded as a mere filling-in or adjunct of the landscape generally, and treated as such with silent contempt.

"Yes, he must be an artist!" said the girl, as if in answer to the inquiring gaze bent on hers from her canine companion. "Well, if he is, he will not hurt us, and we shall not hurt him. That's pretty clear logic, isn't it, my dog? So we will be off on our journey at once, and leave him the bank in peace, then he can sketch what and where he wishes," and once more Olive stretched out her hand



to loosen the chain which held the boat in check. "See, he's coming past us, Zouave!" she muttered, in a lower tone; for, indeed, the stranger was close upon the little landing-stage by this time; "we shall see what he's like before we go!"

In that instant Olive most emphatically showed the woman.

Here was a stranger—a man—moreover, something new and fresh in her monotonous life, and no one desired to see what he was like, be he young, old, handsome, or ugly; and hence she stayed her hand, ever so little, on the chain ere she finally loosed it, as he passed still evenly and leisurely by the old wherry in the stream.

As the man went by he glanced first at the dog, then at the girl.

Had anyone asked Alan Chichester the simple question why he looked first at the dog, and afterwards at the woman, since, assuredly, by rights the woman should have come first, he could not have answered the question satisfactorily either to himself or his questioner, for reason failed to account for the fact.

Instinct may possibly have warned him that sweet girl-faces are dangerous things to look upon, and prevention certainly better than cure.

Then it would have been wiser for him not to have looked at all, had instinct advised him in such fashion; for, in one look, one glance, what joy and sorrow may be wrought unwittingly; what rapture, and, again, what grief, may be seen in one short fleeting moment! A lifetime of bliss or woe!

His glance, however, was not an obtrusive one in the smallest degree, nothing with which the sourest could grumble or evil at, though when it travelled slowly from the dog to the human face it rested there a little longer, perhaps, than was strictly necessary to the occasion, yet how should one find fault for that? Humanity will gaze at its own species, be very sure; and, indeed, to speak honestly, it was really a very pleasant, friendly stare, after all is said.

Then the chain fell with a little splash into the water, and the boat swirled round into the fast running stream, as the stranger moved a few yards further on, and again stopped to contemplate the beautiful landscape.

He did not vouchsafe another glance at the drifting wherry or its occupants, but seemed lost in a survey of the scenery round and about him. Presently the stream had carried the boat far past where he stood on the bank, leaving him still wrapt in seeming meditation of the beauties of Nature. But I will not assert that he did not glance once, yes, and even twice, in the direction of that boat ere it finally disappeared round the bend of the river, which hid him, the creek, the landing stage, and the nestling village from sight.

"Zouave!" said the girl, as they passed round the jutting bend, and she was sweeping the oars dexterously through the water, with a professional wrist; "what is your opinion of the stranger? Is he good, bad, or indifferent honest, think you?"

Zouave had carefully curled himself round in a great black ball at the bottom of the boat, when it began to move, and seemed in no mood for discussion. He only blinked his eyes several times, in a lazy, half-hearted kind of fashion. Clearly to him the subject called for no special comment; what could it matter to be or his little mistress whether this artist were good, bad, or even indifferent honest? After those few lazy blinks he closed his eyes.

A few more long strokes with the oars, then Olive said again,—

"I am certain he is a gentleman; he looked every inch one. Don't you agree with me, my dog? Now do answer me, dear old doggie; it becomes monotonous to answer all one's own questions oneself. Come now, say yes or no at once, you bad boy!" authoritatively.

Zouave unclosed his eyes, with a faint pro-

test at being disturbed from his slumbers shining in them, and then he gave one single tail-tap.

"Ah, that means yes! So you do think he looks like a gentleman. Well, we both agree then, and I am sure we are both quite right," in almost a triumphant tone. Then she added, slowly, "and, oh, Zouave! he had such—such grey eyes!"

But this time Zouave was obdurate, and kept his shining eyes firmly closed; not a movement betrayed that he heard his mistress's assertion. If he heard he might have said, "What to me or to you, dear little mistress, are a man's grey eyes?" Ah! what, indeed, Zouave? Well ask that simple question, if you could frame it with your dog's lips. Greater minds than yours have sought in vain to solve the riddle. "What is human love? why is heart knit to heart, and soul to soul, for weal or woe, grief or joy?"

Ask the wind why it blows, the sun why it shines, before you say "why do we human creatures love?" It is a problem hitherto unworked out, a riddle unsolved. So will it be for evermore. We are powerless to answer.

"Oh! you lazy, lazy dog!" put in Olive, reproachfully the next moment, eyeing the recumbent black ball at the bottom of the boat; "I don't believe you are paying the smallest attention to a word I am saying. Stay, though, why should I call you lazy? It is not fair of me, is it?—and I won't. You shall have your nap in peace, dear old Zouave; so slumber and dream, slumber and dream undisturbed. Dreams are always best, they say. Perhaps the wisecracks are right, if one could only acknowledge it; and yet, are they right? Dreams are sweet enough sometimes, but reality must be sweeter still. How I wish I knew!" she ended, wistfully; and the river, lapping against the sides of the old wherry speeding quickly on its way, sang its answer softly and pathetically thus,—

"Knowledge is not always sweet, Olive, believe me. You may think so now, because you are young, and do not yet know life as I do. Experience alone will teach you the truth of what I sing to you now. It will come as surely as the years ebb and flow, like the tide. When age creeps on you, then you will sigh that I have told you the greatest of all living truths."

But the running stream sang its answering song to heedless ears. Age was far away in the dim future; only youth was here—beautiful youth; and youth never heeds such songs as these.

"Such—grey—eyes!" murmured the girl, thoughtfully, after a little silence, as the boat glided down the lapping, winding river to the sea.

## CHAPTER II.

"Willing or no, who will bat what they must, by Destiny!"

And can no other choose?"

The shadows lengthened slowly over the river as the noon fled away to join the past, flinging their long branching arms across the flow, as if to bar the passage of that cumbersome old wherry with its human freight. But it sped through them easily enough, propelled by the girl's steady sweep of the oars.

The Odet is one of Brittany's most lovely rivers, winding in and out hills, rocks, meadows, and dales in sweet variety. From its source to the sea it is one long scene of beauty.

It had already begun to widen a little as the boat neared its mouth, where it fell into the sea; and Olive could scent the fresh briny smell of the ocean-wind stealing upon them even now, as if it were giving a welcome to friends.

The fishing hamlet of Sablette was built at the junction of the sea and river. It was a great place for the sardine fishers, who lived in tiny cots along the sandy reach lining the shore, where they hung or laid their sardine nets to dry in the sun after the laden boats

came in with their cargo of little sardines, which were then sent off at once to Carneau to be cured. The hamlet existed by their fishing, and sometimes it went very hard with them.

There had been a large take, however, off Sablette on the previous day and night. The news had reached Pont l'Abbaye, and old Nannette hearing of it had expressed a longing for a few of the little silver fresh fish; hence Olive's journey down the beautiful river to the sea this August noon, for the girl seldom let an opportunity pass of doing some kindness to those about her, were it but of a trifling nature.

The fisherwomen, who sat knitting at the doors of their cots while the nets dried, saw her coming as she ran the boat on to the hard yellow sand of the reach, and quickly shipped her oars. They nodded and smiled pleasantly at her.

"Ah! so you have come to see us once more, mademoiselle!" they cried, cheerily, as the girl got out of the boat and went nearer them, where they sat on the wooden benches at work.

All the fisherfolk in Sablette knew her. They had seen her for many years, coming to and fro, now and again—seen her from child to woman; and she was an immense favourite with them.

Many a time when things had gone hardly with them she had come with a pleasant word, smile, perhaps just a few sous to help them; and again, though she was English born, she could chatter away to them in their own tongue as fluently as themselves.

"Yes," she returned, frankly, with a smile, which showed the dimples in her cheeks, "I have come to see you again, because I want something. I have come to beg of you."

"What is it you wish for? What can we poor ones give you? You are always welcome to whatever we have, that you know, I am sure," they said again, pleasantly.

"Well, I only want a few fresh sardines for Nannette; she has a great fancy for some."

"Is Madame Blaise ill, then?" asked one woman, with a little shrug, "that she could not come herself for the fish?"

"Her rheumatism is bad again, poor old thing! She slipped into the mill-pond reaching for some water in the bucket, and caught a chill."

"And so you make yourself a fish-carrier; but you are always amiable in these things!" ended the woman, quickly.

"One must be something in this world, Manon, then why not amiable?" said Olive, smiling again. "Well, which of you have a few sardines to spare me? We heard it was a splendid catch. I suppose they are all at Carneau by this time?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; carted off at once as soon as landed. Ah! never did I see so many! I think millions of little silver fish! It is a blessing for us!" answered one of the group, in a thoughtful tone of voice.

"My husband brought me home a few—but a handful," put in another woman. "You see we are glad to send all we can away; but you are very welcome to them. There were but few, as I say, for one never keeps many for oneself. I will get them for you," and she laid aside her net she was mending, and went inside her little wooden, thatched cot, while Olive sat down on the bench, and Zouave at her feet, with calm dignity.

The woman presently returned with a small bundle of sardines—about a couple of dozen—laid in a tiny rush-woven creel, on some fresh plucked grass, to keep them moist and cool.

"I have put them in a little creel, that you can carry them easily. The grass will keep them cool, too, in this heat. I am sorry there are not more for you, mademoiselle."

"Thank you many times, Manon. It is very good of you to give me your fish. If Nannette did not wish for them so much, I would not have begged them from you!"

"It is nothing—nothing at all. I am glad

to give!" murmured the woman, placing them on the bench.

"You shall have the creel back. I will bring it when I come again," said Olive, rising to her feet, and taking up the little rush-woven basket in her hand.

"Yes, when you come, that will do well enough. Besides, my Jean can weave me some more if I need them. They are useful for the little fish sometimes."

Olive did not offer to pay for the sardines, for she knew that none of them would ever receive payment from her for anything like that.

They would have felt it almost like a personal insult if she had tendered them money for what they gave freely as a gift. So she always took anything frankly enough, making it up to them in some other way. Besides which, to speak truly, she seldom possessed money to give them. Her wants were few, hence she never felt the necessity of the possession of money in any degree.

"Well, a thousand thanks, Manon. I am sure Nannette will appreciate your fish immensely. Come, Zouave, old boy; if you have quite finished contemplating that starfish under your nose we'll be off, homeward bound," she said, moving a few paces towards the boat, high and dry on the sand.

"Ah! but you are surely not going to leave us so soon?" chorussed the group. "Stay and talk with us a little; we are idle just now. All the work is over. It cannot matter for half-an-hour. Tell us some news!"

"News I have none," laughed Olive. "And please remember, that I came down with the stream, and I have to get home against the stream, which makes all the difference. I expect I shall be quite late enough as it is, even if I go now at once. Too late, very likely."

"So that madame's tongue will be a little more bitter than usual, is it not?" queried one, significantly, with a little pout of her lips.

"Very probably, Jeanne," assented Olive, still smiling though. "So you see the necessity of my not staying to talk with you. Besides I have nothing to tell you. Sablette bears a good deal more than Pont l'Abbaye, I think, as a rule."

"Is mademoiselle going to the fête at Quimpaire? There will be grand doings in the town then!" asked another, knitting as swiftly as the wind while she spoke.

"And the theatre is to be opened for the fête just for that time only. It has been closed for long, but a grand company is coming to play. It will be splendid!" chimed in Jeanne, briskly.

"I don't suppose I am likely to go, at any rate," said Olive, with emphasis.

"Madame of course thinks that one is going to perdition straight if one goes to a theatre. Oh! the folly of it. I have no patience. As if when one is young one should not enjoy life. Bah!" and Jeanne shook her snow-white, high-starched cap in disgust at the bare idea.

"I believe madame was never young. It must be like that," satirically answered Manon.

Their appreciation of this said madame was clearly at a very low ebb.

Olive, however, answered neither yea or nay, but took up the creel once more in her hand.

"Good-bye all," she said, with a nod of her pretty head, "we will have a nice little talk another day when I have more time to waste. Into the boat, my dog!" she added to Zouave, awaiting his orders patiently.

"There, get in, mademoiselle; I will push the boat off, and a good voyage to you," said Manon, following her to the water's edge.

"Bon voyage!" echoed the rest of the group from their wooden benches, as Manon, with one vigorous thrust of her brawny brown arm, set the wherry once more afloat.

Olive waved her hand to them in return, and then turned the boat's head on its homeward journey, carrying away the fragrant sea-scent with her. Soon Sablette lay behind her

on the sea, wrapped in the gathering evening haze.

The homeward way was far harder work than the outward one had been. The stream ran so swiftly, but the day was cooler now, and made the task less arduous.

Olive rolled her cotton sleeves up to her elbow, showing two plump, soft, dimpled arms, well-shaped, and a little browned by the sun's kisses.

She never thought it mattered much whether they were brown or not. The idea never troubled her girl-mind in the faintest degree. That they were at all pretty with their soft, faint tan never presented itself to her imagination. Vanity was not a predominant feature in Olive's disposition and character.

Having rolled up her sleeves, she thrust the big, shady straw hat further back from her eyes to feel the evening breeze, for the sun no longer peered too keenly inquisitive into her face, as it had done earlier in the noon.

As she started from Sablette the sun-god was beginning his evening farewell to the earth, flooding the sky with crimson, orange, and purple streaks.

"With various ray, lights up the clouds, those  
beauteous robes of Heaven,  
Incessant roll'd into romantic shapes,  
The dream of waking fancy."

Now the glow was dying out in the many-hued heavens. By the time Olive reached the little creek branching from the river the beautiful gloaming had fallen, softly, sweetly, and full of peace.

"I wonder if he is still sketching?" she had thought at several odd moments during her row back against the stream.

Of course by that most ambiguous "he" she meant the artist-stranger who had been left on the bank. There was, in fact, no one else who could have answered to the personal pronoun employed. Strange to say, she did not in this case appeal to Zouave on the matter. Zouave, her usual *fidus Achates*, was not asked. Indeed, in her inner consciousness, she was not altogether certain that she ought to have thought or to think anything about this said stranger at all.

He was only a man, just an ordinary man, of more than ordinary good appearance, perhaps, to be strictly veracious, good height, well built, and well clothed. Nothing especially out of the common all this, truly. Nothing except those two grey eyes. They were not common orbs, Olive decided, remembering the glance from them as he passed by.

But for those deep grey eyes she felt positively certain she would not have thought about him one bit. It is a most excellent thing to be able to provide oneself with a decent excuse at a moment's notice—so useful and comforting to one's own feelings.

In this case the girl made those grey eyes the excuse for allowing her mind to dwell on this stranger; and yet even while she did so there was a vague dissatisfaction with herself on that very account. She had never heard that quotation:—

"Willing, or no, who will but what they must, by  
Destiny!  
And can no other choose."

Had she known it she might have had a far better excuse for her thoughts than a pair of grey eyes, for who can controvert destiny? It is as immutable as the grave itself.

"This comes of living in Pont l'Abbaye!" she commented mentally. "There is never anything to think about all the year round out of the usual monotony, consequently, when anything fresh does happen to appear, one cannot help thinking about it, for lack of something better to do."

As Olive reached the little landing-stage at the mouth of the creek she glanced along the weed-grown river bank with something almost akin to excitement; not that his still being there sketching would have made the smallest difference to her one way or another. She would have gone on her way to the mill

exactly the same as usual, not turning a hair's breadth in his direction or swerving from the little path through the tangle which led along the creek to the mill at its head.

Still for all that she was in the smallest measure vaguely disappointed to see that nothing human remained in the place where he had been. The bank was vacant, empty, bereft of the sketcher—the stranger had vanished.

"He's gone, Zouave!" said Olive aloud, as she shipped the oars in the boat. "Grey eyes has departed. He has sketched his sketch, and the river will see him no more. Well, we don't care two pins, old boy, do we?" she added, stepping out of the boat, and refastening it to the iron ring on shore. "He's nothing to us, so why should we care? We don't, my dog, do we?" But she carefully scanned the bank all the same while she spoke. But he really was not there. Nothing human marred the beautiful solitude in the gloaming.

"Here Zouave! carry the creel like a good dog. This side now, hold it just here;" and she put her hand where his mouth should go. He took it obediently, wagging his tail-tuft to and fro with a pleasurable motion.

The girl waited a moment at the water's edge, then she said, meditatively,—

"I wonder what part of the river he did sketch? You and I will go and look. I expect it's that bend opposite, with the Tourelle in the distance. Most artists like that view best. We saw one take it two years ago, didn't we, my dog? And an awful mess he made of it, too; not a bit like the real thing, not half so lovely. We'll satisfy our curiosity before we go, Zouave," she ended, walking slowly along the bank to the place where the stretcher had been but so lately, and then stopping short.

Zouave might with every justice have given Olive the "retort courtois," and avowed that it was her curiosity alone which required any satisfying. For his part, he did not care two brass pins for either the sketcher or the view which had been sketched. He might also justly have given her a gentle reproof for dragging his name into this question of the hour, since he himself felt no curiosity desirous of being satisfied, it being really and truly all on her side; but he followed after obediently enough, holding the handle of the rush creel firmly in his mouth.

"Yes! my dog, it is the view I thought, and a very lovely view too! I only hope he has painted it well—not smudged it in anyhow like that dreadful impostor did two years ago! What an awful daub it was! Do you remember how you and I looked over his shoulder while he was doing it, and how he sent us off like a pair of naughty children? Perhaps we were then, two summers ago. This one to-day looked as if he really could paint though. 'Heavens!' she broke in abruptly, in accent of self-condemnation. "I will not think about him any more. It's perfectly ridiculous of me, Zouave, isn't it?"

Zouave's eyes certainly said yes quite plainly, but his tail never moved a hair's breadth.

"I do not know why I feel so curious about him," mused the girl, gazing over the water in the dim gloaming, and the shadows had quite covered the river now. "It must be those grey eyes; it cannot be anything else. I'm ashamed of my curiosity and of myself too. I'll banish the obnoxious subject at once and for ever from my mind. How late it's getting! what a wiggling we shall get, Zouave! I tremble in my shoes at the bare thought of it. Come, right-about face, and for home."

So saying Olive turned round, the dog moving with her; suddenly she stopped short.

"Zouave!" she said, in a low tone of intense excitement, "grey eyes has left something behind him. Look!" and stooping, she picked it up from the long grass at her feet.



## CHAPTER III.

"Tell me where is fancy bred; in the heart, or in the head?"

It is engendered in the eyes; with gazing fed!"

OLIVE's heart beat pleasantly fast in her excitement, as she stooped to pick up this something lying in the thick grass by the river—lying where it had evidently been left or dropped unawares by its owner—presumably, of course, the stranger artist.

It was a small black leather portfolio, about eight or nine inches long, fastened over with a little thin leather strap. On its face were two gilt initials, A. C., in old English capitals! Olive contemplated them at length.

"A. C., A. C. I wonder what A. C. stands for?" she hazarded, regarding the initials with close scrutiny. A is of course the Christian, C the surname. A might mean anything—Adam, Arthur, or even Aaron. He did not look like an Aaron though, with a short laugh to herself. "As for C, I give it up. I wonder what is inside? I suppose it would not be such a dreadful thing if I opened it and looked, eh, Zouave?"

Her query was a mere matter of form, it must be owned; more perhaps for the sake of argument than anything else. The dog stood stolidly by as she proceeded to unstrap the leather case in her hand.

"There cannot be any harm in my looking inside, I am sure. Besides, the owner's name may be written down, and then it will be easier to restore it, for of course we won't keep it, you know, my dog; that would never do. In any case, if the name is not visible it can be cried in Pont l'Abbaye to-morrow morning. Of course it belongs to grey eyes; it must belong to him. I don't suppose anyone else has been here but him this afternoon. I feel sure it is his, and I don't think he would mind my opening it now. He did not look so very stern, did he?" said the girl, half jokingly, as she loosened the strap and slowly opened the portfolio.

It was full of small sketches, some in pencil, some in colours, little odds-and-ends of drawings, women's heads in Breton caps, men's heads in berretas and slouch hats of Brittany proper, children's faces, nooks and corners of scenery; all lightly sketched, but charmingly drawn. One and all had that same A. C. pencilled on them, but there was nothing further in the way of a name than these two letters—nothing at all to show what that A. C. stood for.

"I think A. C. might just as well have written his own name in full inside his portfolio, Zouave, don't you?" put in Olive, with the smallest feeling of disappointment at the paucity of information to be obtained from the opening of the treasure-trove, as she stood looking first at one, then another, of the small drawings with immense interest; for she recognized at once how extremely well they were done; forgetting how time was on the wing, and that the evening was going from the earth slowly and surely.

The light was already growing hazy and dim, and the evening's mists wreathed themselves over the running river.

At last she had looked at one and all of the little artistic bits, and only then did she close the portfolio with a small sigh of regret. To her they seemed quite gems of art, and so true to nature, both individually and collectively, that she felt as if she could never weary of gazing on such sketches as these before her now.

"I should like to sit down and look at them all over again, and I would do it too, and brave the wiggling for being late, only it's getting too dark to see them properly. You dear old patient thing, waiting there while I'm looking at A. C.'s drawings!" she went on, remorsefully, to the dog standing by her side. "Well, you shall not have to wait for me any longer. I've looked at them all, and I approve, my dog, approve very much. I don't suppose A. C. would care very greatly for my

approval or condemnation, but that cannot be helped. He shall have his portfolio cried in Pont l'Abbaye to-morrow morning the first thing, and if it is not owned, why I shall keep it; but if A. C. comes to the fore and claims it, why, of course, we shall have to hand it over to its legitimate owner; in which case it is to be hoped that A. C. will prove himself a sensible man, and be intensely obliged to you and I, Zouave, for finding his lost property for him." Olive ended, gaily and jauntily, turning round, preparatory to moving home.

In a second the jauntiness fled from her face, and a look of dismay spread slowly over it, intense and almost mortified dismay; for there, just behind her, with a little amused smile on his lips, stood the stranger artist, and she felt in that same moment that he had evidently heard her dissertation on himself and was highly diverted by it.

Olive stopped involuntarily short, and looked at him, doubtful for the instant what to say or do.

"A. C. is a sensible man, and he is most infinitely grateful to you," he began, at once, as if in answer to her speech, and still with the small amusement lurking round about his lips.

He said it with such a pleasant ring in his voice, so kindly and friendly, that Olive's dismay melted away.

As she glanced up at him, the portfolio still in her hands, she felt herself slowly beginning to smile in return. Yes! literally and emphatically, a smile.

"I suppose you heard what I said just now?" she said, a little shyly.

"Well, yes, I did," he assented, quietly.

"I was talking to my dog Zouave. Of course, I never imagined anyone was behind."

"You were too engrossed in looking over my poor little sketches to hear me as I came up. I thought I would not disturb you," he ended, comically.

"The portfolio is yours, then?" asked Olive, slowly, more, perhaps, by way of something to say, than because it was really a case of grave doubt in her mind as to who was the owner after all.

"Yes, it is mine. I am A. C.," he returned, with quiet emphasis.

For the life of her Olive could not prevent her cheeks dimpling into laughter as she thus heard him adopt her own expression, and call himself, as she had dubbed him, A. C.

As he saw the dimples come in her soft cheeks, he thought to himself what a sweet girl-face it was standing before him—sweet, and full of winning charm!

"Your drawings were all signed A. C., or, of course, I should not have thought of it," she began, apologetically.

"I do not mind in the very least, believe me," he rejoined, quickly. "Pray do not imagine me such a captious individual as to mind being christened two capital letters of the alphabet. In fact, I rather like it, to tell you the truth; it has the merit of novelty, at any rate," he added, with a laugh.

Olive did not feel herself in a position to argue this point with him, not as yet knowing what the A and C stood for. She would dearly have liked to ask, had such a proceeding been permissible, but she knew enough of social etiquette to be fully aware that such questioning was not usual in the *haute monde*; and so, with all the instincts of a lady, she discreetly held her peace.

"Since it really does belong to you, then, I will deliver it up to you now," and she tendered it to him.

"I can vouch for being the owner," he answered, taking it from her outstretched hand. "I laid it down by my colour-box while I was sketching here this afternoon, and quite forgot it when I left. I only remembered it just before I reached the hotel, and came back at once, to find it in very good company," with a little courteous bow.

"I am pleased to have found it," rejoined Olive, simply. "You did take a sketch here, then?"

"I began one, it is only half finished. I found the sun setting, and gave up until to-morrow, when I shall endeavour to finish it off."

"May I see it?" she hazarded, hesitatingly the next moment, not quite certain whether she was infringing on the rules of etiquette by asking such a permission.

"I am afraid you would hardly recognise the landscape yet, for at present it is in a very primitive state of colouring. But," he went on, in a rather quicker tone of voice, "if you care to come down here to the river to-morrow, and view it when it is more advanced, and nearer completion, I shall be delighted to show it to you, and feel honoured by your criticisms."

So frankly and easily was it uttered, and the idea seemed so simple, that Olive accepted the situation in the same frank manner.

"I certainly should like to see your sketch," she answered, lifting her eyes to this stranger, who in these last few minutes seemed less a stranger than an acquaintance.

"Then come," he put in again. "As I say, I shall be charmed to receive any good or bad criticisms upon its merits and demerits."

Olive thought a moment, then she asked, slowly,—

"What time will you be sketching?"

"What time—well, perhaps all day," he answered, at once. "There are one or two bits besides that I am anxious to paint. I may look forward, then, to seeing you here to-morrow?" and he gazed down at the girl's face with those grey eyes about which she had mused on her way to the sea.

"I think I will come," answered Olive, still slowly, gazing back at him in the dusky gloaming.

"I hope you will," he said, once more. "Indeed, I shall consider that you have promised to come, and tell me of my painting faults. I am always grateful for the smallest hint about my colouring, and you seemed to view my small bits just now with quite an artist's eye. I shall, in fact, be disappointed if you do not appear to criticise my sketch. But you will not disappoint me—you will come?" he urged, frankly.

"Yes; I think I will come," she returned, quietly. "Good evening."

"Good evening," he echoed after her, raising his hat.

And then she turned away from the bank, from the running, swirling river; and, with Zouave at her side, walked quickly along the tangled, grown-over path along the little creek, which ran up straight from the Odet to the old water-mill at its head.

The gloaming was fast fading into the summer night, and the bats flitted hither and thither from bough to bough of the alders and great, sweet chestnut trees lining the creek, and circling over the girl's head like black shadows of things to come.

As they reached the old water-mill gate, and Olive lifted the latch with a little click through the summer night, a figure loomed through the gloaming, and stood at the doorway looking out into the dusk.

"Now for our wiggling, Zouave, old boy!" murmured the girl under her breath, as she saw the dim outline filling in the centre of the old mill-door; and even the dog slunk a little behind his mistress, as he, too, saw the apparition.

As Olive neared the door a harsh, cold voice said, in some displeasure,—

"You are late again, Olive. How often must I request you to be in by eight o'clock. I will not have you wandering about at this time of night. You continually disobey me. I shall have to find some means of enforcing obedience if the mere expression of my wishes fail to ensure it."

"I am so sorry I am late, Miss Daunt!" answered the girl, apologetically. "Have you been back from the convent long?"

I have been waiting more than an hour

for you," coldly responded the figure, who looked gaunt and grim enough to answer to the voice, which was disagreeable enough, Heaven knows! "What have you been doing with yourself at this hour of the night?"

"I went down to Sablette!" murmured Olive, a little confusedly, the dusk concealing the pretty red flush that rose to her cheeks as she answered Miss Daunt's query.

"You go too far!" said the voice, coldly, again; "in future you will please to curtail your wanderings as I bid you. Go and shut the gate; you have left it open."

And the tall, thin figure, with its harsh voice, hard face, and bands of black hair neatly smoothed on either side of the hard face, disappeared again from the doorway inside the mill.

Obediently Olive went back to fasten the gate, which had swung back after she had passed through.

She did not mind the wiggling very much, for she was thinking about something far more interesting.

She gazed down the little path under the alders and chestnuts, as she lingered by the gate in the summer gloaming. The bats still wheeled overhead in the soft grey dusk.

"Yes, Zouave," she murmured, softly to herself, as she turned away at last from the gate, "I shall—go—to-morrow!"

(To be continued.)

## HAD WE NEVER LOVED SO BLINDLY.

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

SEVEN years have passed away since Eustace Trevanion was laid in his grave. Time, which is said to heal all sorrows, had not reconciled his sister to his loss; not that she went about with a dejected air, or was given to continual lamentations, but often when alone she would sit, and think, and sigh over what "might have been if only he had lived," and an irrepressible longing would come over her to go to him as he could never come back to her.

She loved her husband devotedly, but she could not help seeing that a change had come over him lately. He was subject to long fits of depression, for which she could not account, and when suffering from them, could not bear to have his little boy come near him.

Flora had proposed to call the child "Basil," but his father wouldn't hear of it.

"I don't want my name to be perpetuated," he said, with a frown. "I'm sick to death of it myself. Call him Eustace. I believe you like it better than any other name in the world."

"Not than any other," reproachfully.

"Let him be Eustace Trevanion Fane, and then if he takes a dislike to the name of Fane he can drop it, and still have a surname of his own."

"Drop his father's name!" Flora exclaimed, in horror. "He would as soon give up his birthright!"

"Birthrights are often put up to auction nowadays," he said, with a bitter smile. "And there are few things safe from the hammer."

"My son will never give up his," looking down with infinite pride at the tiny scrap of humanity in her arms.

That tiny scrap grew into a fine child, the exact image of what his father must have been when a boy, and Flora worshipped him.

But she was not allowed to degenerate into a head nurse, as many young mothers do, for society had its claims on Lady Fane of the Abbey of Greylands, and would not permit them to be neglected. Consequently it became an annual necessity to give a large ball to the county, besides innumerable dinners, garden-parties, &c., &c.

Miss Emily Willoughby had become Mrs. Winder, and being now on a visit to the Rec-

tory, was anxious to have an opportunity of showing off her bridal finery. Miss Jenny, on the other hand, was equally desirous of meeting some of the young males of the county in order to put an end to the state of single blessedness of which she was getting tired.

Therefore there was joy in the hearts of the twins when a large square envelope appeared, with a card enclosed, bearing an invitation to an "At Home" at Greylands on the twelfth of July, with the magic word "dancing" in the corner.

Mrs. Edgar Winder was drinking tea at the Firs when the invitation arrived, and the twins rejoiced together.

"The twelfth of July!" exclaimed Jenny, ecstatically. "Then he'll be here!"

"Who do you mean by he?" with an assumption of ignorance which did not deceive her sister in the least.

"You know very well," impatiently. "Frank's coming home just two days before, and now there'll be no Flora in the way."

"Don't you be too sure!" with the superior tone of a married woman to an unfortunate spinster. "Edgar says, in London, society is so depraved that young men run after the married women much more than the single ones."

"Luckily, we are in the pure and innocent country!" clapping her hands; "and, besides, I should like to see Sir Basil's face if anyone tried that sort of thing with his wife!"

"Doesn't Philip Fane?" said Emily, significantly. "Edgar said he would knock him down if he caught him looking at me as he does at Flora?"

"How fortunate that you are quite safe, for I don't think poor dear Edgar could manage it," with fine sisterly impartiality.

"You had better not let Edgar hear you. And now I must go. What dress shall you wear? I shall go in my white satin," a "bridal" smile upon her lips.

"And I shall get a new dress out of papa before mamma gets hold of him. I suppose the dear old dad will condescend to take us. He always goes if Flora asks him."

"Astounding what influence she always has over men," as she stooped to pick up her sunshade—a smart one out of her trousseau.

"Well, let us wait and see till the twelfth comes; but mark my words, if Sir Basil takes an idea into his head about those two, that Flora has a sort of liking still for Frank, and Frank still hankers after Flora—there's an end to all peace at the Abbey."

"I tell you nothing of the sort," said Jenny, irritably. On the contrary, she looked forward to a delightful return to the old times of frank girl and boyish intimacy, before a rival of superior beauty came upon the scene; and to ensure such a result she intended her own toilette to be as magnificent as her father's purse and the Hardechester dressmaker's skill would allow.

And what had become of Philip Fane? He was much the same as ever. His face had grown keener and thinner than it used to be; and there was an air of restless, unsatisfied anxiety about him, which chased the former expression of calm superciliousness into the background, only to be brought out on occasions. He hadn't been idle during those seven years; his suspicions had deepened into something almost like certainty, but proof was absolutely wanting. His mother often wondered why he never married, but Sir Basil didn't. He knew that he was waiting—hopelessly perhaps, but still waiting—for any chance that might bring about his cousin's death, and deliver Flora into his hands.

"He might wait," Sir Basil said to himself scornfully. "If Flora were a widow to-morrow she would simply forbid Philip the house. I daren't do it—but she would, without a moment's hesitation."

So Philip came and went, much to the surprise of some of the dowagers of the neighbourhood, who thought his manner to Lady Fane most objectionable, although no one but

he himself could complain of the way in which she treated him. Saubbing he grew used to; only sometimes, when Flora's wrath had carried her too far, such a gleam would flash from his eyes as boded no good for her future, if he was to have any control over it.

"Is Philip coming for this evening?" Sir Basil asked, when the day of the twelfth had already arrived, and Lady Fane's toilette was almost completed.

"I don't know. I hope not," as she held out her wrist for him to fasten her bracelet. "I never feel quite comfortable when he is in the house."

"If you really wish to get rid of him he shall never trouble you again," looking earnestly into her lovely face. Was there anything on earth that he wouldn't risk to save her one moment's pain?

"No, never mind. I can put up with him. Won't you come and see the boy before you go down?"

Sir Basil assented, and they went together to see little Eustace Fane. The child was fast asleep, his thick black lashes resting on his velvet cheeks, his breath coming softly through his rosy, parted lips. Flora bent her head and kissed him, whispering a blessing to his unconscious ears; and then she looked up into her husband's face with a smile.

"I hope he'll grow up just such another man as you, and then the Fanes will have somebody to be proud of."

"You might wish him something better than that," his face sad and grave as he laid his hand carefully on his little son's head.

Then they left the nursery, with a kindly good evening to the nurse; and Sir Basil being called away to answer some question about the arrangements, Flora went down to the drawing-room alone.

Some one started up from a sofa, and came eagerly towards her, with a bunch of white lilies in his hand.

"Oh, how d'ye do?" said Flora, curiously, as she held out her hand. "We were wondering if you were going to honour us or not."

"You knew I should," said Philip, pressing her hand in his—she was so glad it was gloved. "Have I ever stayed away when you asked me?"

"A formal invitation is nothing. Have you had any dinner?"

"Yes, thank you. I'm not in the habit of starving till nearly ten o'clock," keeping his eyes fastened on her face. "You are looking too charming for earth. Will you condescend to accept these lilies?"

"They are very lovely!" taking them in her hand; "but I have the bouquet that Basil ordered for me. These must adorn the room!"

"They are not meant to act as furniture," sharply. "I've brought them down from London, and either you will hold them in your hand, or they shall be thrown away."

"Can I hold two?"

"First one, and then the other. Why not?" Basil drew, I next. What is to prevent?"

There was something in his tone that seemed to imply that his thoughts went far beyond those simple flowers; and she remembered he had said words to the same effect, but with a wider meaning, the day when he tried to break off her engagement.

"Basil always," she said, defiantly, as she laid the lilies on the table, and took up her own bouquet of roses.

"Flora, don't drive me too far," speaking through his set teeth, and laying his hand on her arm. "Take those flowers, or heaven have mercy on your husband!"

Their two faces were close together—the one beautiful and defiant, the other pale and determined; but presently the defiance went out of her, and she smiled.

"Lilies were always my favourite flowers."

"And you were always my favourite cousin," and stooping quickly he kissed her low, white forehead.

As she drew back with a gesture of disgust the door was flung open, and "Lord and Lady



Rivers, Miss Rivers, and Captain Rivers" were announced in stentorian tones.

Was she dreaming? Was it Frank's face—browner, thinner, but handsomer than ever—looking at her with a sort of stern gravity over his father's shoulder?

Her colour came and went, her voice trembled, for the sight of his face carried her back to the days that were long ago; and she scarcely knew what she was about as her hand was taken first by one and then by another till it rested last of all on a sunburnt palm, and Lady Rivers was saying quietly,—

"I have brought my boy to see you. He only arrived last night, so this is the first house he has come to in the neighbourhood."

"So very glad," murmured Flora, stopping short, because her voice was wavering so insanely.

Her husband saw her emotion, having come in just in time through another door, and his heart stood still with a sudden fear. Philip saw it, too, and caught a glimpse of another kind of revenge on his cousin if all others failed him.

They both misjudged her. It was the ghost of her brother, which rose up at the sight of the young soldier's face. He was alive, and still the hope of her life when they last met.

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was a splendid ball, with everything combined to make it perfection, and Jenny Willoughby's heart beat fast with joyous expectation as she followed her sister's bridal train into the first reception-room.

She had not changed much in those seven years—a little fatter, somewhat rosier, rather more confident in her manner, but still with the same countenanced appearance, to which the Harrogate dressmaker failed to give any style.

Flora looked up.

"I wonder what's the matter?" she whispered to her sister, as their heads came close together in the crowded doorway.

"Don't you see?"

The words snapped out, because somebody had put his heel on the tail of her dress.

And then beyond Flora she saw a tall form, a fair head, a face which, in spite of sunburn and a heavy moustache, she recognised at once as that of Frank Rivers.

"They say programmes are going out in London," drawled Edgar Winder, as a basket, filled with white and silver cards in the form of shells, was handed to him.

But Jenny didn't hear him; in fact, she would have been left without a card if Edgar had not thrust one into her hand.

"How late you are!" exclaimed Flora, as she gave them a cordial greeting.

"Are we? So Jenny told us."

She could not explain that her husband had informed her it "was atrociously bad form" to be early.

She thought she had never seen Flora look so lovely before.

Her dress was white, as usual, but most exquisitely trimmed with priceless lace, and she hadn't a jewel about her, except a spray of diamonds amongst her clustering curls.

Frank Rivers looked as if he were a mute at somebody's funeral.

He came forward and shook hands with his old friends, asking after their parents, dogs, and horses, just in his old friendly way. But he let other partners claim them, and quite forgot to ask them to dance.

Jenny went off in a hurry, telling herself that she mustn't be in a hurry, that long before the end of the evening a good time would come.

Brushing at her own self, she refused to be engaged for her favourite waltz, about the middle of the card, hoping to make it a piece of perfection with the right partner to the last tune.

But, alas! the first notes of the waltz struck up, and he still leant against the wall, looking about as immovable as Mont Blanc.

"You are not enjoying yourself?" said Nesta, looking up into his face, wistfully, later on in the evening.

She had been the belle of the ball, with crowds of partners for every dance; but her mother, watching her from a distance, saw no sign that she meant to choose any of them for a partner for life. Would that poor boy, Eustace Trevanion, never be forgotten?

"You are not enjoying yourself?"

"I told you I shouldn't. I've not been used to this sort of thing. I feel thoroughly out of it."

"Perhaps if you would only dance, you might feel better!" her eyes full of sympathy.

"My leg's as stiff as a poker (from a wound in Afghanistan), and you've plenty of people to look after you. I think I shall slope."

A partner carried off his sister, and he was left to his own meditations.

Why had his mother dragged him here against his will? It was bad enough out there to know that Flora was married, without coming here to look on at her conjugal bliss. He had come on sick leave, but his wounds had healed surprisingly, and there was no reason why he shouldn't go back again if he liked—no reason except that his people at home would be cut to the heart.

There was an ugly frown on his good-looking face as he told himself that Sir Basil Fane had stolen his love from him behind his back, and then there was a rustle of a woman's dress on the floor, and a soft voice said, close to his elbow,—

"Why are you not dancing, Mr. Rivers?"

Strange to say, he did not mention one word about the stiffness in his leg, but bent down, his face flushing with eagerness.

"May we dance it together?"

Flora looked round the room. All the evening she had been too much occupied with looking after other people to think of herself, and at his words the blood stirred in her veins. She remembered that she was young still, in spite of her five-and-twenty years; there were no partnerless girls to look at her reproachfully. Those who were not dancing were being consoled with supper; those who were in the room were being whirled round in a ceaseless strain.

"I don't see anything against it," she said, with a smile, and the next moment his willing arm was round her waist, and they were moving gracefully round the room to the strains of "Under the Stars," an old favourite revived for the occasion.

"You have not forgotten it," she said, rather breathlessly, as they stopped when the music did, sensible that she had enjoyed that waltz better than anything she had danced since he went to India.

The scent of the roses in her dress, the soft tones of her voice, the wondrous beauty of her eyes as she raised them to his in a fleeting glance, all seemed to mount to his head and intoxicate him.

"I've forgotten nothing," he said, with a thrill in his voice. "But I've tired you. Come 'under the stars' outside."

She went with him innocently enough, glad to have a talk with him, unconscious of danger; and Mr. Philip Fane watched her with a sinister smile, whilst Sir Basil's face clouded.

"Now tell me what you've been doing," leaning back as they sat together on a low seat under a bush of roses, enjoying the sweet, flower-scented air, the peaceful hush of the night.

"It won't interest you. I—I don't think you've thought of me much since I saw you seven years ago," the long concealed bitterness displaying itself in his tone.

"Then you think wrong. Nesta's been my greatest friend, and she makes you her hero. Tell me of the day when you were nearly done for!"

"Shall I?" leaning forward, his elbow on his knee, his chin on his hand. "I heard it first from my mother! and when I read the letter I felt stunned, as if I had had a thun-

dering blow on my head. I made the grossest mistakes on parade; I forgot that I was on duty the next morning; everyone thought I was cracked or drunk. I wanted a ball to knock me over, so, of course, came out of the next skirmish without a scratch."

"I don't understand; I meant when you were wounded," looking up at him with puzzled eyes.

"I was telling you when I got my worst wound, the other was a fleabite to it. Oh, think what it was to me! Since the first moment that I ever saw you—in a black frock with a bunch of snowdrops in your sash—I made up my mind that you were to be my wife," his voice broke, and he passed his hand across his forehead.

"I'm so sorry," she said, gently, as she put out her hand timidly. "I don't think it was my fault, but don't talk of it any more."

He held her hand so tight that he nearly crushed it, in his pain and wild regret.

"Only your fault because you couldn't help being better, nicer, prettier, than anyone else. I don't want to bother you. I'll never do it again, but I felt as if I should burst if I kept it all in any longer. To see you in his house, to hear you called by his name—it was rather rough on me just at first."

His face looked so utterly miserable that her heart quite ached with pity. What could she say to him? There was no remedy, nothing could be done.

"You will get used to it," softly, as he shook his head impatiently. "Yes, think of my grief. I've lost Eustace, and yet sometimes I am quite happy. I've not forgotten him, and I never shall; but, thank Heaven, I can get on without him, and I never thought I should."

The tears were on her lashes, a pathetic smile hovered about her lips. Frank, looking into her lovely face with wild, resentful eyes, felt half mad to think of all he had lost, and catching her hand to his feverish lips, kissed it passionately. It was a kiss of renunciation as much as anything else, but who was to tell it? Not a jealous husband, watching from a distance; not a man like Philip Fane, who with the blood rushing to his head, nearly sprang forward with the intention of hurling Frank Rivers from his seat, till he recollected that even this might be turned to account, and he turned to his cousin with an evil smile.

"The dénouement has come quicker than I thought. Do you remember what I prophesied would come to pass if you made Flora Trevanion your wife?"

"Curse you," said Sir Basil hoarsely; "they are old friends, and they are glad to meet."

"Glad to meet? Yes. But will they be equally glad to part?" and having given this parting thrust, he went off whistling softly to himself.

It was not in Sir Basil's nature to watch his wife like a spy; but drawing himself up stiffly, he walked slowly and deliberately up to the seat.

"Flora," his own voice struck his ear as being harsh, and he tried to soften it. "I think your guests will be wondering where you are."

A look of surprise came across her face, but she rose at once, and slipped her hand within his arm.

"Is it late? Mr. Rivers and I have been talking of old times, and I didn't know how long I had stayed."

Frank Rivers stood up, feeling dazed, and looking unconsciously defiant, but he said nothing.

(To be continued.)

THE man without a purpose lives on, but he enjoys not life.

It hath ever been the use of the conqueror to despise the language of the conquered, and to force him to learn his; so did the Romans always use, inasmuch that there is no nation but is sprinkled with their language.

## CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES.

CHRISTMAS time will soon be here once more with its long train of festivities, its long bills, its pleasant gatherings; the pantomimes, the dances, the juvenile parties, with the time-honoured Christmas-tree, snapdragon, music, and general enjoyment!

The festival is now sadly shorn of its ancient splendour, but there are still traces of it even before the Christian era. For instance, there is no doubt that the eating and drinking which now distinguish Christmas have descended to us from our remote Teuton and Celtic ancestors; so has the decoration of our dwellings and churches with evergreens and mistletoe, all of which formed part of the ceremonial of the ancient sun-worship.

So that when we hang the holly-branch in our halls and over our altars, we are simply following a custom bequeathed to us by peoples who, however remote from each other in their abodes on the earth, were bound to each other by the common tie of a common worship.

Happily, in our day the observances have a higher and deeper significance. Celt and Teuton, from the rising to the setting of the Christmas sun, are one in the spirit and practice of a faith which, in its essence, esteems this life but as the prelude to the better one promised hereafter.

According to Polydore Virgil, the English were remarkable for the festivities with which they distinguished Christmas; and these are given at considerable length in Brand's "Popular Antiquities."

On the night of Christmas-eve, it was usual to light up candles of uncommon size, called Christmas candles, and to lay a log of wood upon the fire, called a Yule clog or Christmas block, to illuminate the fire, and, as it were, to turn night into day.

At Court and in distinguished families, an officer, under various titles, was appointed to preside over the revels.

Stowe says, "that in the feast of Christmas there was in the king's house, wherever he lodged, a Lord of Misrule or Master of merry Disports; and the like had ye in the house of every nobleman of honour or good worship, were he spiritual or temporal." The mayor of London and each of the sheriffs had their several Lords of Misrule. The Puritans in England were very much opposed to these ceremonies; and in Scotland, the Abbot of Unreason, as he was there called, was suppressed by Act of Parliament in 1555.

Yule seems to have been originally a pagan festival, observed in ancient times among the Romans, Saxons, and Goths, in commemoration of the turning of the sun and lengthening of the day, and was afterwards kept up by the Christians.

In a tract, entitled the "Vindication of the Solemnity of the Nativity of Christ," by Thomas Warmstry (1649), it is said, "If it doth appear that the time of this festival doth comply with the time of the heathens' saturnalia, this leaves no charge of impiety upon it; for since things are best cured by their contraries, it was both wisdom and piety in the ancient Christians (whose work it was to convert the heathens from such as well as other superstitions and miscarriages) to vindicate such times from the service of the Devil by appointing them to the more solemn and especial service of God." The custom of decking churches and houses at Christmas with laurel, box, holly, or ivy, appears also to have been copied by the Christians from their pagan ancestors.

Among other most acceptable festivities, certainly to the recipients, was the practice of giving presents of money to servants and others on the day after Christmas, which is hence called Boxing-day, now almost universally called Christmas Bank Holiday. The practice was, undoubtedly, founded on the pagan custom of new-year's gifts; and, until

recently, it had spread to such an extent as to have become almost a national grievance.

Tradesmen sent their journeymen and apprentices to levy contributions on their customers, and they, on the other hand, bestowed boxes on the servants of their customers. To the tradesman it was a pretence for lengthening out his bill; to the master and mistress for lowering the wages of their servants. In 1836 the secretary of state for foreign affairs issued a circular to the different embassies, requesting a discontinuance of the customary Christmas-boxes to the messengers of the foreign department and others; and since that time the practice has very much diminished.

Music, both sacred and secular, has always been one of the principal, as it certainly is one of the highest and best forms of pleasure during the Christmas holidays, and the special shape it takes is that of Christmas carols, many collections of which have been made. A carol was originally a song sung as an accompaniment to dancing, and afterwards applied to a religious song used in celebration of Christmas. Christmas carols were early in use in the Christian church. According to Tertullian, it was customary for them at their feasts to place in the middle such as were able to sing, and call upon them to praise God in a hymn either out of the Scriptures, or of their own invention. The delight of children, and one of the things they look forward to at the Merry Season, is to go and see a Christmas pantomime, though the chance is being much narrowed, especially in London, where of late years they have been growing fewer and fewer every year.

Few of the young folks, however, know from what the modern pantomime took its rise.

In the widest acceptance of the term pantomime means art of expressing action and emotion by gestures without calling speech into play. According to most authorities on the subject, the word pantomime, as we understand it—that is, meaning a performance based more or less on mimicry and gesture—was originally invented in Italy; and entire theatrical representations were given consisting of gestures only, or what is now known as "dumb show." Under the first emperors this species of performance was particularly developed. The most celebrated rivals at this era in the art were Bathyllus, Pylades, Hylas, and others, in the days of Augustus.

The people took the greatest interest in them, and riots were frequent, owing to the crowds who gathered round the doors of the circus long before the hour of performance began.

Gibbon says of them: "The vast and magnificent theatres of Rome were filled by three thousand female dancers and three thousand singers, with the masters of the respective choruses. Such was the popular favour which they enjoyed that in a time of scarcity, when all strangers were banished from the city, the merits of contributing to the public pleasures exempted the actors from a law which was strictly executed against the professors of the liberal arts."

In these representations the pantomimes became low and degraded in character, and some ancient authors ascribe the decadence of Rome as owing in part to their influence.

In the Italian masks a trace of the old performance can be found, and most of the characters which we now use in pantomime were then embodied. Clown, pantaloon, harlequin, and columbine have all their representatives in these old comedies, and their individuality has been maintained, though in the modern pantomime the jesters are permitted the use of dialogue; and the ballet, which formed such an important part in its performance on the Roman stage, is still retained. The "opening," however, and its scenic effects have thrown the harlequinade proper into the shade.

On "Twelfth Day" the Christmas holidays are supposed properly to close, and Twelfth Night has appropriately been selected for the occasion of many peculiar celebrations in

many parts of the country, among which may be specially mentioned the well-known Twelfth Night characters.

Like many other of the old-time observances connected with Christmas, nearly all of these have fallen into disuse, and nothing more is now usually attempted than an ordinary dancing party, or at the most a fancy ball.

Still, whatever shape their Christmas festivities take, we trust that all our readers will enjoy them to their hearts' content, and that

"This thought in the midst of enjoyment will stay."

That there are many on whom the black ox of misfortune and poverty has set his foot, and to whom the holy festival can bring nothing brighter or better in their lives of endless toil unless the spirit of charity, "so dear to heaven," is amongst us in all our revelry, and shelters them under her snow-white wings, and carrying in her train the grand message—"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men."

**BADEN BADEN'S BATHS.**—Close to the new castle stands the Friedrichsbad, the most splendid and largest bathing-house in the world, so we are told. It is three stories high, rising up against the southern slope of the Schlossberg in the form of terraces, and backs directly against the hot springs, which give vapour for the Russian and heat for the Turkish baths. In some of the rooms the bathing tubs are hewn out of the solid marble. They have steps leading down to them, and each is provided with apparatus for a shower or a jet douche. Some of the tubs have the sand or mud at the bottom; they say it is good for "rheumatics." In each room there is a comfortable couch where you may read and nap after your bath as long as you like. Upstairs, on the second floor, I had some sport in a large circular swimming bath, four feet deep and twenty-eight feet in diameter. It is wholly constructed of marble, and provided with steps around its circumference. This magnificent bath-house is 200 feet long; it cost over 400,000 dollars, and, unlike most establishments of the sort, the accommodation for the women is precisely the same as for our sturdy selves. I must be permitted to add that the house belongs to the city and State, and that no fewer than fifteen physicians of Baden are ready daily to give visitors' advice as to the proper kind of baths to take.

**PROCESSION OF THE BRIDE IN CAIRO.**—Friday is the fortunate day for Moslem weddings in Egypt. One is pretty sure to come across the procession of the bride at some time or other during that day, in the Mooskee, Cairo. The shrill note of the Arabian pipe announces its approach. If it is a bride of an opulent family, a little army of pantomimists is impressed into the service, as much to amuse the spectators as to do honour to the occasion. First, we have the two rustics, who are never omitted from a "fantasia" of this kind, cudgelling, or rather pretending to cudgel, each other with quarter-staves. Then comes a clown, mounted on a camel, beating lustily two kettle-drums; while a melancholy-looking jester, with cap and bells complete, mounted on a sorry jade, is scattering stale jokes among the bystanders. There are circus-riders, too, in tights and spangles; water-carriers, clinking their little brass saucers, and ready to fill them gratuitously for any one in the crowd who asks; a man with a vessel containing rose-water, which he sprinkles now and then on either side of him; and a bevy of young, white-veiled maidens, walking to and fro, all preceding the little bundle of cashmere shawls and petticoats shuffling along under a silken canopy. More players playing strange stringed instruments, and more drummers beating drums, close the procession, which, amid cries of warning delivered right and left to ladies on their donkeys and "sheikhs" in their slippers, squeezes its way through the teeming street.



## RARE SPONGES.

A GLASS show case contains two remarkable sponges. One is the largest sponge ever found. It was pulled up off Florida in 1872, and it is exactly circular in shape, except where a hole was made by tearing it away from its bed. As it hangs in the case, dry and compressed, it is about four feet in circumference, but when its thirst is quenched with several buckets of water it swells out to eight feet.

The other curiosity is the largest cup sponge ever known. It came from the Grecian Archipelago and won a medal for beauty at the Fisheries Exposition in London, in 1882. Its surface would cover several square feet, and it is valued at several hundred dollars.

There is in the case also an antique earthen jar, with a sponge attached to it. This jar is about a foot and a half high and has four handles. It is of a reddish colour, and must be very old, as it is known that none was made like it since the year 1300. It was perhaps dropped overboard from some ancient vessel. The inside is deeply incrustated with fossil shell-fish.

Sponges come from Florida, Nassau, the Bahamas, Cuba and the Grecian Archipelago. There are about forty varieties, ranging from the cheapest Cuban sponge at seven and a half cents a pound, to the Mediterranean cup sponge at seventy-five dollars a pound.

The latter, however, are generally sold by size, and not by weight. They are used by surgeons in dressing wounds, administering chloroform and the like delicate operations.

The common grass and yellow sponges are worth forty to sixty-five cents a pound, and the sheep's wool sponges, such as are used in washing carriages, bring two dollars a pound.

Bath sponges run up to five dollars a pound. The supply of sponges is less than the demand, and that keeps the price up. Formerly sponges were obtained off Florida by dredging machines, which tore up all, big and little alike, but laws have been passed which prohibit the fishing of sponges less than four inches wide and four inches long. This shuts out the dredges.

The sponges are obtained by coloured divers or by fishing with hooks.

The divers are trained to the business from childhood, and are able to stay under water for a surprisingly long time. They cut the sponges loose with knives and bring them to the surface.

The divers run much risk from sharks. The hooks are attached to long poles, and in order to see the sponges an odd kind of telescope is used. This is a tub about five feet deep, with a clear glass bottom.

The fishing is done in from twenty-five to thirty feet of water, and when this tub is moved along the bottom it enables the fishers to see the sponges beneath it with great clearness. The poles are then lowered and the sponge torn away with the hook.

Sponges are very offensive in smell when taken from the water, and soon grow worse. This is cured by burying them in dry sand, and when decomposition has ceased, exposing them in wire cages to the action of the tides.

**VIVACIOUS GIRLS.**—The are two kinds of vivacious girls, and you shall choose between them. She of mock vivacity laughs at everything, no matter how trivial, and says, "Oh, how funny you are!" at every remark she hears. She can swim, and ride, and play lawn tennis—all of which accomplishments, in the face of her tightly-laced waist, fill one with a real admiration for her prowess, in spite of her odious manners. She is always trying to say something witty; is addicted to the punning habit; talks of learning to box; is so glad "girls nowadays have some spirit"—as much as to say, "You see before you a complete specimen of the admirable creature I describe;" and is, generally, loud, slangy, and egotistical. The genuinely vivacious girl is as sweet as a rose, and as restful.

## ON CHRISTMAS MORN.

I MIGHT, if I would, forget my loss  
In the praises that others bestow,  
Since my Willie sailed in the *Albatross*  
'Tis just one year ago,  
For I've suitors rich, and I've suitors grand,  
And I've suitors of high degree;  
But never a one in all the land  
Shall throw me a kiss or press my hand  
Till my Willie comes home from sea.  
Here's a beautiful blue forget-me-not  
In the leaves of my prayer-book pressed  
And Willie's sister-bloom has got,  
With my miniature, near his breast;  
And how full of deceit were those keepsakes  
Sweet,  
And how sadly used were he,  
If he were not sure that his own true love  
Would one day nestle his heart above  
When my Willie comes home from sea.  
So, I'm climbing this Christmas morn the hill—  
Be merry, my suitors all,  
You may laugh at my love and faith your fill  
In cottage, bower, and hall;  
For the lightkeeper mutters a word that cheers  
As he passes the glass to me.  
Quick! give it me, man! What sail appears?  
Be quiet, my heart! for amid the tears  
A ship in the bight I see.

Hurrah! Was there ever an ocean bird  
With wings of a nobler sweep?  
She grows on my gaze as the Gospel Word  
On hearts that have sorrowed deep!  
Now her topsail folds in the breezes toss,  
Now her pennant flutters free,  
Now her name I read—'tis the *Albatross*!  
Good-bye to suspense and doubt and loss,  
My Willie comes home from sea!

D. N.

## DOLLY'S LEGACY.

## CHAPTER IX.

SHE was dead!  
The woman he had once loved so rashly—  
loved, 'tis true, with a boy's idealising affection, which clothes its idol with the bright hues of imagination and then worships the creature of his fancy rather than the living woman—rather than a man's fervour—yet, withal, his first choice, was dead.  
Do not judge Herbert hastily. He was only a man like other men. He had shown great forbearance to the poor wreck of womanhood who was gone.  
He had provided for her needs, had uttered no reproach to her when she came a suppliant for his bounty. And yet the fact remained; just the scrap of paper which proclaimed her death filled him with a deep gladness.  
It was not joy that she was gone; it was intense gratitude that he was free—free to give his name to the beautiful girl who trusted him—free to begin life afresh with home, wife, and love.

He was not yet thirty, and yet he had often felt old and careworn. His youth seemed to come back to him in all its vigour when he realized that Magdalen was dead.

Magdalen! Yes, the woman who picked up Paul Clifford's violets—the woman whose little child had been her one tie to life—was Herbert Sinclair's wedded wife by the law of England.

At the very time which the certificate gave as the date of her death she had just acquired the title of Lady Asherton.

Herbert was not heartless. Even in the first glow of his relief he remembered the days when this poor wreck of humanity had been all the world to him.

He wrote to the doctor whose name was appended to the certificate, making himself answerable for the funeral expenses, and any

other outlay that might have been incurred. He could not bring himself to speak of the dead woman as "my wife"; he would not even call her by his own name. He described her very simply in his note as "Magdalen."

The reply was less short and prompt. Dr. Mundy begged to inform Lord Asherton that Mrs. Bertram had defrayed every expense before leaving Rhymington. Magdalen Sinclair had had a plain, but decent burial. If at any time his lordship was in the village, the Doctor would have much pleasure in showing him the grave.

"I am glad I wrote," soliloquised Herbert, as he read the note. "One hears of such miserable deceptions. There have even been such things as forged certificates. No fraud has been played on me. Poor Magdalen is, indeed, dead, and I am free."

He took a very pretty furnished cottage in Kent; his idea of foreign travel was quite given up now. He bought many a beautiful trifle to decorate the home that should be his bride's; he meant to stay in Keston until the autumn; then, if things were propitious, he would reveal his marriage, present his wife to his friends, and request the Duchess to present his Dolly to the Queen at the first Drawing Room next season.

This much was due to their rank; but Herbert meant to live a quiet, domestic life. It was as his wife he pictured Dolly, not as his future duchess.

He thought nothing of the title. He was a proud man. He might have dreaded a wife with a large family, of low-born relations; but Dolly had no kindred, and her own grace and beauty were better open sesame to any hearts than descent from a hundred grandfathers.

He was quite contented with his darling as she was. What did it matter that her name was Smith?

When she was Lady Asherton her past title would be as forgotten as if it had been Montmorency or anything equally high-sounding.

The Duke and Duchess of Portsea were decidedly surprised when their son refused to accompany them to take possession of the family seat.

"Really, Herbert," urged his father, "you might remember the duties of your position!"

Herbert smiled.  
"I have a very particular engagement, father!"

"Bertie," pleaded his mother, "do be persuaded! Portsea Abbey will have no charms for me if I must enter it without my son."

He smiled.  
"Mother, I would come if it were possible, but my word is passed."

"Where are you going?"  
He did not like to refuse her an answer.  
"Into Northshire."

The Duchess threw up her hands.  
"Herbert, you have only just come back from Northshire. What can be your attraction there?"

"I am painting a picture of the fine scenery—a picture which is to make me famous!"

"You don't need fame, Bertie. If you were an artist, depending on fame for your fortune, it would be different, but now—"

"You would rather have heard one of the Ladies Devereux was the attraction that drew me to Northshire—oh, mother mine?"

"They are nice girls, Bertie!"  
"Are they? Better than their mother, perhaps! I think Devereux more of a cad every time I meet him!"

"And yet you were his guest for nearly a month!" remonstrated his mother.

"I didn't stay for the pleasure of his society. I think he is a scamp, and that Lady Madelaine Charteris is very much to be pitied!"

"Didn't you know it's all over?"

"What's all over?"

"The engagement."

Lord Asherton looked surprised. That John Devereux admired (that's a mild word for it) his own pretty fiancée he knew perfectly well. Surely he had never sacrificed the engagement to Lady Madeline, thinking he had a chance with Dolly?

"I wonder how that came about?"

The Duchess smiled.

"You know you're longing to tell me, mother!"

Her Grace fell into the trap.

"Well, the Earl confessed to me his daughter's heart had never been in it; and one day she went to him in tears, and begged him to leave his whole fortune to her cousin, if only the engagement might be broken."

"Poor child!"

"Luckily Lord Charteris had just discovered one or two very disgraceful things against the Viscount, and he took the opportunity of the rupture on himself."

"She was a great deal too good for him!"

"She is free now," said the Duchess, joyously; "and, Bertie, she would be a daughter after my own heart."

Herbert smiled.

"Mother, I think I must let you into a little secret," he said, simply. "Your daughter-in-law is already chosen, so you need not spend your energies in selecting young ladies eligible for the post," and then he fairly bolted before his mother had time to ask a single question.

Very much surprised would the Duchess have been could she have been introduced to the fair, golden-haired girl who was to be her son's chosen wife—very much bewildered could she have known the events then passing at the grand old castle of Field Royal, which she had not visited since the days when her boy's godfather and namesake was a bachelor.

That strange foreboding of ill did not leave Dolly; if anything, it increased as the hours wore on. In vain she told herself that in three days' time her lover would be at her side—in vain she reasoned no great trouble could befall her while he loved her.

She was still sad and anxious. There was a wistful yearning in her violet eyes, a tremulous fear about the corners of her mouth, which made her far more like the Dolly of Madame Marguerite's showroom than the bright girl who had been the sunshine of little Mab's life.

Lady Mabel watched her friend anxiously. Since her mother's return—since she had fallen back into her old position of the lonely neglected one—all the child's querulousness seemed to have passed. She was the same affectionate little creature who had first won Dolly's heart, and she was openly anxious about her friend.

"You look so ill, Dolly! Does your head ache?"

"Just a little!"

"Oh dear, I wish it didn't."

"Why, dear?"

"I don't like you to be in pain, and it is worst of all for it to be this morning, because mamma is coming to the schoolroom on purpose to be introduced to you."

Dolly trembled from head to foot. She had lived four months at Field Royal; and though she had never seen the Countess, had gathered a very good idea of her character. She knew instinctively my lady was what is termed a "hard" woman, and she dreaded the meeting which was before her.

"Are you sorry?" asked Mab, quaintly. "I think mamma means to like you. She told papa this morning she meant to keep you a long time, because you were so cheap."

Dolly blushed, as she thought how the Countess's intentions would be frustrated.

"Mamma is always trying to save money," went on Mab. "She says she is quite sure we shall all be ruined some day, but papa says she has prophesied it for more than ten years without its happening, so he doesn't mean to worry."

"When is Lady Desmond coming, Mab?"

"I don't know; she may be here any time."

Dolly disappeared with a view to changing her dress. It was possible Lady Desmond might object to the pretty morning wrapper as unscholastic; a merino loaded with crepe would be far more governess-like.

She was not away ten minutes, but when she came back she knew before ever she opened the schoolroom door the visitor had arrived.

"I call it gross neglect," said a hard, metallic sort of voice. "I pay Miss Smith to teach you and sit with you. Why should she be absent attending to her toilet at this hour?"

Mab's defence was inaudible.

Dolly pushed open the door and walked in, conscious that every minute she remained outside her courage was ebbing out at her finger tips.

She saw a handsome, if somewhat hard-featured woman, under fifty years of age, across whose wiry black hair another hand than that of time had sprinkled threads of white; a rather coarse complexion, very bright bead-like black eyes, which seemed to read you through and through. Such were the chief characteristics of Dolly's employer.

"Miss Smith, I presume. I am happy to make your acquaintance," began the Countess, in her usual abrupt manner; then, as she turned her head, and saw the slight, graceful figure advancing towards her, and caught sight of the refined patrician face, in all its wistful beauty, the words died away on her lips, the colour faded from her cheeks. For the first time within the memory of her youngest daughter Matilda Countess of Desmond was speechless.

Do you know what she feared, what dread assailed her?

I firmly believe that every deed of cruelty we commit brings even in this life its own peculiar punishment, even though at so remote a time that sometimes our memory fails to connect the cause and effect.

Undoubtedly Matilda Devereux had been as cruel to her sister-in-law, Viola, as woman could be to woman. She had never really sorrowed for her death. Even while affecting to mourn the Countess she had triumphed in the aggrandisement of her own children, but from the moment of her brother-in-law's death her punishment set in.

From the instant she listened to the reading of Lord Desmond's will but one idea took possession of her—namely, that some day she and her children would be expelled from Field Royal by the child of the detested Viola.

In vain her husband reminded her of the certainty of poor Lady Desmond's death; in vain he told her fiercely that if she were superstitious enough to believe a judgment would come on her for her treatment of the Countess Viola the loss of two-thirds of his income was surely judgment enough.

Matilda would not listen to reason. From that day forward she was always expecting to see someone advancing to claim Field Royal, and wrest it from her husband and his children.

This fear embittered her whole life. Possessed of an income sufficient certainly for comfort, she pinched and scraped in her own expenditure till she often bore the nickname of "miser." She had no pleasure in life.

And now after ten years of idle fears, after ten years of miserable apprehension, just when, after that pleasant sojourn in Paris, her husband (with all her faults he loved her dearly, though how he could have managed to do so is a problem I decline to solve) had at last almost persuaded her to drop her favourite bugbear; now in her own house, in the girl who was her daughter's friend and companion, she saw the realisation of all her fears.

For an instant she believed the Countess Viola stood before her in all her youth and grace.

Then she remembered the flight of time. Viola if alive must be five or six-and-thirty. This stranger was a mere child—a child. Of course, that was it. The daughter of Viola

and her husband come after all those years to claim her birthright.

Terrified at her mother's appearance, Lady Mabel begged the Countess to tell her what was the matter.

Dolly fetched a glass of water, and offered it to the great lady, who waved it impatiently away.

Then suddenly Matilda recovered herself. The game was not up yet. This girl might be at Field Royal seeking to prove her right to it, but clearly the case was not proven yet. To get Dolly into her power, to prevent her ever claiming the heritage of the Desmonds, here was a trait besting Matilda's best powers.

Quick as thought she reviewed all she had ever heard of Miss Smith, and she decided that at least when she came to Field Royal she was unconscious of its having anything to do with her. It might be she really believed her name was Smith. As for Lady Desmond, if a dozen certificates had been brought forward proving the girl's descent from the family of Smith, if all the Smiths came forward in a body to claim her as a kinswoman, it would have no influence upon Matilda's opinions.

The moment she looked at Dolly's face she seemed to know she was her victim's child. Her feelings were those of Lady Macbeth when told that the wood of Burghmuir was marching towards the castle, or yet more like the wicked king of olden days who exclaimed, "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?"

But just that one thought that all was not lost yet, that she had time yet before her to use for her children, armed Matilda with fresh courage. She was ready to fight to the bitter end for her first lover's sake. She cared not what misery, what cruel suffering she entailed on the fair, innocent girl before her, so that at least she had her wicked will.

Her manner changed as though by magic. She was still pale, but the unnatural trembling ceased. She explained her illness as a sudden faintness to which she had become subject in Paris. Perfect quiet had been prescribed for her. She thought, yes, she might say she had quite made up her mind she would not go down to the ceremonious lunch downstairs—she would just have a morsel at the schoolroom early dinner. She was most affable; she established herself in the easy chair, and inspected Mabel's sketches; then she requested Dolly to sing, and praised the girl's rich, sweet notes as though each of them was not a blow to her own hopes, as proving yet another resemblance between this stranger and those she deemed her parents.

"Are you an orphan, Miss Smith?"

Dolly's reply reassured her. The girl answered "Yes" so readily, so unconsciously, that the Countess felt certain she believed her own statement.

"Poor child!" said Lady Desmond, sympathetically, "it is a sad loss for one so young, and I fear a recent sorrow?" touching the crepe tucks on the girl's dress.

Some instinct made it painful for Dolly to answer Lady Desmond's questions. Her dead mother's words, "Never trust a Devereux, never be friends with them, they are all false and cruel," rang in her ears with cruel distinctness; but the Countess sat there, all benevolence and interest. Her nursery governess dared not refuse her a reply.

"My mother died in January," she said, slowly, "just before I came to Lady Mabel."

"And perhaps she heard of the plan for your future? It must have been a relief to her to know you were in some measure provided for?"

Dolly shook her head.

"She was ill such a short time we had no thought of what I should do without her. All our plans for the future had been for life together."

"You meant to be inseparable?"

"I was a dressmaker"—Dolly did not blush;



there was no false shame about her. "When my apprenticeship was over we were to have set up in business in the country—mother loved it so."

"And your father?"

"I don't know much about him. I think my mother lost him before I was born. He was a great traveller, and very fond of music. Mother used to say I inherited his love of it."

"It must have been hard for her to be left a widow so young. Are you like her?"

Dolly sighed.

"Not the least in the world, and I do not resemble my father either. People often used to say they could never believe in family likenesses again."

"And I hope you are happy with us, Miss Smith?"

Dolly blushed, thinking that though Field Royal had been a happy home to her, she would soon leave it for one yet happier.

"I am very happy, my lady."

"I am quite satisfied with you, Miss Smith. I shall hope to retain you with my daughter for some years."

"Thank you, my lady."

"By the bye, what is your full name? How old are you?"

"I was christened Dorothea. I shall be eighteen next September."

My lady sighed. The date was a fatal confirmation of her fears.

"It is as I thought," she muttered to herself; "she is Viola's child, but she has no suspicion of it herself. What dreadful fate brought her to Field Royal? I suppose some people would answer, the hand of an all-seeing, avenging Providence. Well, I am not hopeless. She must be in my power and crushed. Perhaps it is as well I saw her. With her face she is certain to marry young. In a few more years I should have had to protect my children probably against a whole family instead of one defenceless girl. I must think."

When her husband came upstairs later on in the afternoon seeking his wife he found her in her own boudoir, trembling in every limb, as one who has the ague. Her face was perfectly livid; her eyes were starting from her head, their pupils dilated as though from terror. She looked a good ten years older than the handsome, well-preserved woman who had presided over his breakfast that morning.

Poor Lord Desmond was aghast. A weak man in his early married life, his wife had managed to get the reins of domestic government, and held them so adroitly that now, far from resenting her authority, he leaned on her so completely that without her he was like a rudderless vessel.

"Matilda," he cried, in honest, genuine alarm, "what on earth has happened?"

The Countess did not answer; it really seemed to him for a moment that she could not. He saw her lips move, but no sound escaped them.

"Matilda—wife, are you ill? Why didn't you ring for help? I'll send for the doctor at once."

He had risen, and crossed the room towards the bell; another moment, and he would have pulled it furiously, but his wife's hand was on his arm.

"Stop!"

Oh! how hoarse and unnatural her voice sounded! Even that one word cost her an almost superhuman effort. She staggered as she turned to go back to her seat, and but for her husband's supporting arm would have fallen to the ground.

Very tenderly! Ah, met how much tenderness in the world is wasted and thrown away upon women incapable of appreciating it, while others—creatures of a gentler, more sensitive type—wear their hearts away in longing for it! Very tenderly did Lord Desmond place his wife upon the sofa; then bending over her he entreated once more to learn what was the matter.

Lady Desmond's eyes roamed restlessly round the room.

"Are we alone?"

"Perfectly."

"Look if there is anyone in the corridor."

He searched, and assured her there was not; then he closed the door, and was coming back to her side when this command reached him.

"Lock it."

He turned the key in the lock, sat down by his wife on the sofa.

"Now, Matilda, I assure you that we are alone; not a creature can overhear what you say, and I implore you to tell me what is troubling you."

"Can you bear it?"

"I can bear anything better than seeing you like this. Come, Matilda, we are both well, and have good accounts of all the children. Things can't be so very bad."

"They are."

"In Heaven's name, tell me plainly; speak out, and let me know the worst."

And thus adjured Lady Desmond opened her lips, and pronounced this one word,—

"Ruin!"

"Nonsense!" cried the Earl, quite cheerfully (you see he had heard this prophecy so often it quite lost its force). "Why, Mattie, you have never been worrying yourself with your old trouble again? Why, I thought I had persuaded you to have done with that folly!"

"Folly!" she said, solemnly. "I tell you, John, it is the simple, awful truth."

"Nonsense," returned Desmond, not in the least impressed. "Why, Mattie, don't you know you have brought me this story at least a dozen times since poor Herbert died? I really believe you can't see a child whose age corresponds in any degree with Lady Viola's loss without fancying it is her son or daughter. Think of the Italian organ-grinder who you declared had my poor brother's very smile."

His wife looked at him appealingly, still with that awful dumb terror in her eyes.

"Don't laugh at me. I can't bear it."

He had never seen her so impressed. He had witnessed many "scares," but it dawned on him gradually never one quite so bad as this. Lady Desmond looked, so to say, like a woman stricken for death.

"You haven't told me anything, you know," said her husband, patting her shoulder affectionately. "You just frighten me out of my senses by looking ready to die; and then when I desire an explanation you flatly refuse to say anything but just one word—'ruin!'"

Lady Desmond started.

"I forgot, you haven't seen her."

"I have seen no one dangerous to our peace of mind, nor do I believe, Mattie, any such person exists, save in your troubled imagination, my poor wife."

The Countess wrung her hands.

"Hear him! The rain I predicted for years has come to pass, and he calmly says it is my imagination!"

Poor Lord Desmond! He deserved some pity. What with his wife's anguish, and her persistent delay of an explanation, he had a good deal to try him on this bright May afternoon.

"Have you had any letter, Matilda?"

"What need is there of letters, John? I tell you, the calamity is here, even at our doors!"

The Earl sighed heavily; then for the first time almost in his married life he took up the authority he never ought to have dropped.

"Wife, either you are alarming me needlessly, or some very awful trouble threatens us. Either explain yourself or I send for Gordon. He has doctored our family for years, and may soothe you better than I seem able to do."

Lady Desmond calmed herself at once, the violent tremblings ceased. She turned to her husband and demanded,—

"Do you remember the late Countess?"

"Perfectly."

"You would recognise her counterpart?"

"Assuredly. Matilda, I have not spoken

much of this matter. I know the past has had an awful punishment for you in your never-ceasing dread of the future. Wife, I have had my retribution, too. I declare my dreams are haunted even now by the fair, sweet face of Viola Deverenz."

"Then go to the school-room."

"My dear, Mab is such a child. Don't have her here to witness your distress."

"I don't want her. Go to the school-room. I don't want you to stay; the most frivolous excuse will do. Here," taking a vase full of primroses from the table, "give these to Mab. She loves spring flowers."

"But I—"

"That is all. Take these to her, look well at all you see in the school-room; but make no comment. Then return to me."

"She must be mad," was the poor Earl's mental decision, as he set off to do his wife's bidding. "Poor thing! she has brooded and brooded over Herbert's will until it has become a monomania with her; but, anyway, my little girl may as well have the flowers. I'll take them to her."

He entered the school-room. Mab was not there, she had been taken to her own room to dress for tea; but a young girl sat in the window-seat so lost in a reverie that she never heeded Lord Desmond's approach, never even knew that her solitude had been interrupted.

He placed the flowers on the table, looked round the room, and saw the object of his wife's fears.

He had never had the least sympathy with her terror; he had always declared the silvery, watery Way knew the secret of the Countess Viola's disappearance; but as he gazed on this golden-haired vision his assurance was staggered.

He hurried from the room then. Strong man as he was he reeled up against the wall of the corridor, and almost clung to it for support. His wife had worried over her children's future, but even she had no idea how fatal this blow would be to it. Lady Desmond had insisted that a thousand a-year should be put by to provide for future trouble. She had pinched and screwed in the house-keeping and personal expenses to add to the fund. Utterly ignorant of law it never dawned on her that if her husband were ousted from Field Royal it would mean the estates and its revenues had never really been his at all, and every penny he might have put by would have to go to his brother's child as a small slice of the great debt of ten years' revenues which he had spent. Lady Desmond believed that nearly twenty thousand pounds, at any rate, was secured to her children. Her husband knew as a fact that if they were driven from their home they would take with them nothing but their clothes, and he would (in the event of the claimant pushing their right in the bitter end) have a burden of debt upon his shoulders he could never hope to repay.

For almost five minutes he stood there motionless, the great drops of sweat falling from his forehead in his anguish. This had come upon him with awful, startling suddenness. His wife had often foretold it, but Lady Desmond by her frequent alarms had been to him a modern edition of boy ever the-crying "wolf," till at last he had decided every woman must have a hobby, and as she had chosen this for hers it could not be helped.

At last he moved away; his wife would be expecting him. His delay might add to her misery. He walked slowly towards the boudoir. Usually the Earl strolled along with head erect and flashing eye, the picture of prosperous, well-satisfied middle-age. This afternoon his very walk seemed altered. He was like a bowed-down feeble old man, as he crept, crest-fallen and cowed, down the wide passages that led to his wife's boudoir.

"Well!"

At other times it had been rather a grievance to Lady Desmond that her husband did not share her terrors. To-day she would



["IN HEAVEN'S NAME, SPEAK OUT," THE EARL SAID, "AND LET ME KNOW THE WORST."]

have given years from her own life if he would have laughed at her alarm. Alas! there was nothing like merriment in his face. By his abject step and broken-down manner she knew his feelings, but she insisted on his expressing them in words.

"Well!"

"Don't ask me, my poor wife."

"I did."

"You saw her?" persisted the Countess.

"And you thought—?"

"Why make me tell you, Mattie. For one moment I thought I was in the presence of Viola's ghost! It was her very look and very gesture."

"I suppose it can't be an accidental resemblance?" asked my lady, looking fixedly at her husband.

He shook his head.

"I am not a superstitious man, Mattie. I never believed in 'fates' and 'chance' as you do; but I am certain that girl has been sent to our house by nothing less than an avenging destiny to make us expiate the share we had in her mother's troubles."

"She does not know."

"I understand. She is here unconsciously, but the secret will out."

"I don't mean it shall."

He shook his head.

"You're a clever woman, Mattie, but unless you shut that girl up some day she will meet someone who knew her mother's history, and all our happiness will be over."

"I shall shut her up."

"You can't."

"How lucky Paul Clifford is in London. Infatuated as he was about Viola, he would recognise this girl at a glance."

"Aye."

"I wish Jack had married her."

The Earl started.

"That would right everything," he said, gravely. "I wonder I never thought of it. Of course we will confide in Jack. It's really very lucky Madelaine threw him over. If Jack

marries her it really won't matter so much, after all."

"Jack won't marry her."

"But if he knew all that depended on it!"

"You don't suppose, when I heard Miss Smith was young and pretty, my fears didn't go to Jack. I know he has no sense where a girl is concerned. I asked him point-blank whether he had been flirting with his sister's governess?"

"Even if he hadn't he might begin now," suggested the Earl, feebly; "begin in earnest."

"I shall never forget his answer," said Lady Desmond, shuddering. "He turned on me with an oath, and said the girl flew at higher game. Those were his very words."

"But if she knew he was serious, the thought of being a countess—"

Matilda sighed.

"If she were Devereux's wife I could breathe again."

"Well, I daresay she'll yield to proper persuasion when she knows his family have no objection to the match."

Lady Desmond groaned.

"You forget she has Viola's blood in her veins. Have you forgotten Viola's foreign, romantic, passionate nature? Depend upon it this girl is like her, and will marry for love. I have cross-questioned Mab pretty thoroughly, and I fancy the girl has set her affection on Lord Asherton."

"Herbert Sinclair?"

"Yes. One comfort, he's not a marrying man. If she liked to waste her life in wearing the willow for him it wouldn't matter."

"I can't see why you care whether she marries. If she refuses Devereux the rest matters nothing to us."

"It matters everything."

"How?"

My lady passed one hand across her brow, as though to still some inward force of her brain, and then she said, slowly,—

"A single girl is easily disposed of. There are ways and means of silencing her. A wedded wife, the mother of children who inherit her claims, is very different."

Lord Desmond looked down at his wife, admiration shining in his eyes.

"Mattie," he said, proudly, "you've thought of something."

The wretched woman, who had caused the domestic misery of the Countess Viola—who cared not what torture she inflicted on others so that her own brood were safe—smiled, such an awful smile, enough to make the blood curdle in one's veins.

"I have."

"What is it?"

She shook her head.

"It is better far for you not to know. You have trusted me pretty thoroughly in our wedded life, John. Have I ever failed you?"

"Never."

"Then trust me once again."

"You won't do anything dangerous?"

Her black eyes gleamed at him a little scornfully.

"Don't be a fool, John. Great ills require desperate remedies. So that we keep Field Royal, so that our son is heir, that our daughters are the Ladies Devereux, what matters?"

Hers was the stronger mind, the more powerful character, if the more base. He cowered to her will; only one stipulation he ventured on, an abject look of fear on his craven face the while.

"Mattie, you won't kill her?"

"Am I a murderess? Who talks of killing? I think you are beside yourself."

But he protested.

"I have her mother's face to haunt me as it is, and one such ghostly visitant is enough. Mattie, promise me you won't harm the child? After all, it's no sin of hers that the blood of the Devereux flows in her veins."

(To be continued.)





["TELL ME," HE SAID, "WHAT YOU MEAN TO CHARGE FOR YOUR SILENCE?"]

NOVELLETTA.]

## LADY MAY.

### CHAPTER I.

FAMILY quarrels are at all times unpleasant, and, for the most part, lasting; but it is very strange, if we search back for their origin, we shall mostly find it to have been of the most trifling nature. Dickens has immortalised a feud caused by two highly estimable maiden ladies having once been asked to tea when they deemed it their right and due to be bidden to dinner; the occasion of the festivity being, if I mistake not, a christening. My Lady May's relations were at warfare with her father—a far stronger reason. They did not resent not being invited to the christening, since, if they had had their own way, no christening should ever have been needed. The Honourable Thomas Glenarvon, heir-presumptive to the earldom of Dunmore, quarrelled with his brother when that eccentric nobleman, at the age of forty-five, led to the hymeneal altar a portionless maiden of eighteen. The Honourable Thomas called the Earl by same harsh names on that occasion, "despoiler of children" being of the number.

But harsh words break no bones. Lord and Lady Dunmore went to Paris for their honeymoon without many regrets for the cold shoulder given them by their relations; and the Honourable Thomas and his family, who resided in a fashionable West-end suburb, calmly turned up their noses, and declared no good would come of such an unequal marriage.

Had good come of it? The family feud was well-nigh twenty years old. Lady May had passed her eighteenth birthday before she saw any of her kindred face to face. During all those years the Earl had never returned to England; his wife died before her child could

walk alone, and the widower devoted himself heart and soul to little May. They were never parted even for a day; together they roved through many a foreign land; together they saw all that was most beautiful in all the cities of the Continent, but yet they never visited their native land, and little May had never even heard the names of the august family in Maida Vale, who hated her intensely, because, child as she was, her existence sent out their son and brother from ever reigning at Glenarvon Towers as fourteenth Earl of Dunmore.

It was June—the month of roses—and never had the summer sun shone on a fairer scene than Lord Dunmore's villa in Normandy. He and May had just arrived on the French coast, meaning to pass three or four months in the pleasant, health-giving region.

May was nearly nineteen now, a slight, graceful girl, with masses of soft, chestnut hair, and large, tender, violet eyes, which recalled her gentle mother.

She was very pretty, this girl who would some day, Heaven willing, be a countess in her own right; but yet her prettiness was her least charm. There was a nameless fascination in the fair face, something almost irresistible in the musical voice; no one ever marvelled that May Glenarvon was her father's idol, that her slightest wish was law to the dignified old nobleman.

But yet there was one point in which he did not yield to the wish which shone in her eyes whenever the subject was spoken of. The Earl made no attempt to return to England; once or twice he had made a hasty crossing to Dover, and, strictly *incognito*, spent some weeks at the popular seaside resort, but he did this only that May might see a glimpse of her native land. He never endured the idea of living in England, or making his home even for a short space at one of the grand old estates that called him master.

"This is a pretty place!"

They were sitting in the grounds of the

Villa St. Marie; tea was spread on a rustic table under some grand old trees. Mab, in a white dress, did the honours of the meal; and Lord Dunmore, sitting near in a comfortable easy chair, seemed well satisfied with life, and with things in general.

The shadow which ever since his wife's death had rested on his brow seemed lightened. He glanced at May with all a father's pride, and a spectator could have guessed the awful secret which weighed upon his heart.

"It is lovely," said May, quietly. "I am very glad we came."

"France is your native country, you know, May."

May shook her head.

"Don't say that, papa. I must be English since you are, and I don't believe anyone who lived in England all their life could love it more than I do."

Lord Dunmore sighed.

"And I hate it."

"Hate it, papa!—your own country, where your home is?"

"My home!"

"To be sure," said May, simply. "All these places where we stay are very nice, but they are not our true home. That, of course, is Glenarvon Towers."

Lord Dunmore stared at his child—a strange expression crossed his face, almost as though of pain.

"It can't seem home to you, May. Why, you have never even seen it!"

"I have seen pictures of it," said May, "and Susan has described it to me so often I think I could find my way alone all over it."

Lord Dunmore played with his teaspoon.

"When shall we go there, papa?"

"Where?"

But he knew quite well.

"Home to Glenarvon."

"Never!"

"But—"

"Aren't you happy here, child—happy with

me? Ever since your mother died I have devoted myself to you. Have I really made you so miserable, May, that you long for a home you have never seen?"

"I am quite happy," she answered, quickly. "I don't think I have ever had a trouble since I can recollect; only I always thought you meant to go home some time. Susan said we should live in London, and that I must be presented to the Queen."

"Susan is an old simpleton."

"And we are to stay here always?"

"Not here; but I have no intention of taking you to England. Believe me, May, it is for the best."

"I dare say; only —"

"Only what?"

"I am English," said May, simply, "and it seems so strange I should know every European country better than my own, and Susan says —"

"What does she say?"

The girl's voice faltered.

"She says I have a great many relations in England. Oh, papa, I do so long to see them! Fancy having uncles and aunts, just like other people!"

Poor Lord Dunmore! he had dreaded this moment all his life. He knew the question must come, but he had not expected it so soon.

"Even if we were in England, May, you would see nothing of your relations. I quarrelled with my brother before you were born, and nothing can heal the feud between us."

May was still listening with a startled, troubled expression in her beautiful eyes, when an elderly woman emerged from the house, and came towards them.

She had once been housekeeper at Glenarvon Towers, and nearly twenty years of foreign wandering had not altered the unmistakable English air of her appearance. She still wore a plain black dress, with a snowy handkerchief crossed on her bosom, a lace cap and black ribbons. She had nursed the Countess in her last illness; she had been May's attendant from her very birth.

Mrs. Norton was a very important person in Lord Dunmore's wandering establishment; a loyal, faithful woman, devoted to those she had served for more than half her life, getting in years now, but active and bustling still, despite her snowy hairs and the sixty winters she had lived.

"What is it, Susy?" asked May, quickly; but the old servant did not seem to hear—she addressed herself to her master.

"There's a woman here, my lord, asking to see you."

The Earl smiled.

"I never see beggars. I thought you knew that, Susan. Give her what you think right, and send her off."

"She's not a beggar, my lord."

"I never see strangers."

Susan looked troubled.

"I've told her that, my lord, told it her well nigh a dozen times; but it's no manner of good. That silly Henri had let her into the hall, and she's sitting on a chair there now, and declares she won't move until she has seen your lordship."

"I shall not see her—she only wants money. It'll be as good to her from your hands as mine."

Susan lowered her voice.

"My lord, I think you had better see her. For your own sake I fear you must!"

The girl May had left them. She stood a little way off, gathering strawberries; they were to all intents alone. Lord Dunmore wiped his forehead; it was wet with perspiration, as though he had been seized with sudden fright.

"What do you mean?"

"My lord she knows something."

"Something!—what?"

"I don't know. She told me, my lord, if you would not see her she should go to London and get speech of Mr. Glenarvon. She said

he might pay her more to speak than you would to keep silent!"

Lord Dunmore shuddered.

"Whom can she be?"

"I don't know. Her face is quite strange to me. But, my lord, I am sure of this one thing—she knows too much for you to lose her!"

The Earl walked wearily back to the house, his last words a request, almost a prayer.

"Keep her away," pointing to his daughter.

"Susan, I would give my own life to keep this from my child!"

Susan Norton watched him out of sight, with a world of pity upon her honest face.

"He's a poor of England," murmured the faithful old servant to herself, "and I reckon there's many envy him. But if they could know the truth he'd give up all titles, wealth, estates, just for an easy mind. 'Keep it from Lady May,' he said. My poor master, he won't see that a day's coming when all the wealth of the Indies couldn't keep the secret he's held these nineteen years from being common talk. Poor child! it would have been better for her if she'd died with her mamma, and I say it though she's the light of my eyes!"

Susan turned to meet Lady May, and we will follow Lord Dunmore in the house.

It was a very unpretentious place; double-fronted, a verandah running all round the house, and the white stone walls well-nigh covered with clambering roses; a vine stretched its cool green leaves over the porch, and the hall, which was bare, and polished to a dangerous state of shininess, had gay Eastern rugs before the entrance to the rooms, and one or two low rustic chairs beside a small oval table.

On one of these sat a woman dressed in rusty black. She might have been fifty. Her appearance was squalid; it was not honest poverty that had brought her to this state, it was easy to see that—a suspicious whiteness of her lips, a puffiness of face and cheeks, told their own story plainly enough.

Lord Dunmore knew perfectly that his strange visitor had come to extort money from him, and he knew also that she drank.

"I am at a loss to understand the object of your visit," the peer began, gravely.

"I'll make you understand it easily," returned the woman, "but I reckon you'd prefer I shouldn't do it here in this open hall."

Lord Dunmore groaned.

"I must trouble you for your name."

"And you're welcome to that, though I shouldn't have thought you'd have forgotten me. I'd have known you anywhere. I am Mary Pearson, and twenty years ago I was Mary Jones, and in the service of the late Countess of Dunmore."

"Enough," cried the Earl; "Follow me. We shall not be disturbed here."

He had opened the door of the library; he closed it again, and led the way into an inner room, where no one ever penetrated but himself without an express invitation. He placed a chair for his unwelcome guest, and said, bitterly,—

"Now say what you have to say; but I expect I can guess your object in coming here. You can have but one—to extort money."

Mrs. Pearson's bold, black eyes moved restlessly round and round the room.

"I expect you're just as rich as you were twenty years ago," she said, coolly.

"My income never changes," was the calm reply.

"And you've kept your secret?"

"I don't know what you allude to."

"Oh, yes, you do. You know when you broke up that pretty establishment in Germany, and kept no one who had ever known you there except that old wretch, Susan Pearson? You paid the servants handsomely; you gave me a thousand pounds, I remember. I was going to America, and you thought, I suppose, it would start me in life. It was a very liberal present to a woman who had only been in your service a few months."

"I believe I gave it you on one condition?"

"Two," corrected the woman, shortly, "that I should hold my tongue, and keep my distance. I've done both for well nigh twenty years."

"I am quite aware of it."

"Things didn't go well with me out yonder," said Mrs. Pearson, waving her hand towards the garden, as though she supposed America to lay in that direction. "My husband took to drinking, and finished himself off. Things were getting worse and worse, when I fell in with a man as knew your brother. I listened to all he had to say, never dropping a word of knowing you, and then I knew America wasn't the place for me. Either you must pay me handsomely to hold my tongue, or I'd ask Mr. Glenarvon his terms if I spoke. Between the two of you, I reckon, I shan't want for a decent living. I've done with work now, and I mean to end my days like a lady."

She came to a sudden stop, fairly breathless after so long a speech. Lord Dunmore had risen, and was pacing the room with eager, restless strides. He had anticipated this moment; for years the thought of it had haunted him, waking and sleeping, but now that it had come he felt as totally unprepared for it as though the idea of it had never occurred to him until this summer's day.

It was perfectly true; he was in this woman's power, and not only he but one dearer to him than life itself. This low, sin-stained creature had it in her power to blight the whole future of his darling child. What was he to do? Was it a bare money question? If he despoiled himself to enrich Mrs. Pearson would she be true to him? Having once received the price of her silence would she keep that silence faithfully?

The woman understood perfectly the thoughts passing through his mind, and at last she said, slowly,—

"If you pay my terms you needn't fear; I'm not going to betray you. A bargain's a bargain, and I'm an honest woman."

Certainly she did not look like one.

The Earl stopped his walk just in front of her, and looked into her face with a strange, searching scrutiny.

"I suppose you have fixed on your terms already? Before ever you came here you knew what you meant to charge for?"—he paused, and then added, slowly—"your silence."

"I'd settled that before I left New York. You see, Lord Dunmore, I never had chick nor child of my own, and my husband brought up his young brother to be just like his own son. I couldn't think more of him if he were my own boy."

The Earl hardly saw her connection with the matter, unless his advancement in life was the price of Mrs. Pearson's silence. He felt puzzled, but merely inquired, gravely,—

"What are your terms?"

Mrs. Pearson bridled; evidently the supreme moment of her ambition had arrived.

"You're a rich man," she said, positively, "and saving that child I saw in the garden you have no one in the world you care to give your money to."

This was quite true; the Earl never denied it.

"I mean to leave all I have to Lady May; no one else has any claim on me."

"You need not call her that to me," said the woman, spitefully. "It's no good keeping up pretences when we're alone, you know."

Lord Dunmore said nothing. His position grew every moment more galling, more humiliating; but he bore his misery bravely, as, indeed, he had borne his secret all these years, and he endured both for the same reason—the sake of his darling May.

"You've no one but her," repeated Mrs. Pearson, sharply, "and I've no one but him."

The Earl thought she was growing daft, but he only listened in silence.

"I don't care for much money," she said, in



a curious tone, "but I want Jim to be rich. Three hundred a year 'd keep me quite comfortable to the end of my days, and I don't suppose you'd even feel the loss of it."

"I am perfectly willing to settle three thousand pounds upon you. You can enjoy the interest for your life, and at your death the principal can revert to—Mr. Pearson."

"Stop a bit," said Mrs. Pearson, sharply; "that'll do for me right enough, but it won't do at all for Jim. He's quite different from me—as fine a young man as you'd find anywhere; and I don't choose for him to wait till I am dead."

"What do you want, then?"

She looked at him sharply; she watched every change in his face as she named her price.

"I mean Jim to be your son-in-law! Let him marry your girl, and you may rest easy I'll keep your secret all my days."

The veins on the Earl's forehead stood out like thick purple cords; but that she was a woman he could have knocked Mrs. Pearson down for daring to insult his darling.

"Woman, are you mad?"

"No, but you will be if you refuse my terms."

"I refuse them utterly."

"Very well, you'll be the sufferer, I reckon. I must get back to England and see Mr. Glenarvon at once."

Lord Dunmore groaned; he could not doubt she would do just what she said. Mrs. Pearson saw her advantage.

"I don't want to behave unhandsome," she said, in a more civil tone. "I've no ill-will to you nor to the young lady, but I must think of Jim first."

"I will assure his future. I will give him a fortune worthy of my own son," said the Earl.

Mrs. Pearson shook her head.

"It won't do. My boy must marry your girl, or I shall go straight to Mr. Glenarvon."

"You are preposterous in your demands."

"I don't want to be Jim's away in Chicago. I couldn't get him here directly even if I would. I don't want to hurry you. Pass me your word that before she's one-and-twenty your girl shall marry Jim, and you need never fear your secret escaping my lips."

It was an awful alternative to accept was two years' respite; but, oh! what a sacrifice? What could the brother of this low, uneducated woman be like? Would it not be better for May to enter a convent, or at least bury herself in some unknown country village? What could be more awful than for her to marry beneath her?

Mrs. Pearson understood the struggle as well as though it had been told her in words.

"Give in," she said, not unkindly. "Law! Jim won't hurt the girl; he's a fine young fellow enough! I'll send for him, and he'll be here in a few months. Then they can have a year or two of sweethearts, and they can be married safe and sound, and no one'll ever guess the secret that has well-nigh crushed the life out of you."

"What is Mr. Pearson?"

"Why, he's just Mr. Pearson. He's five-and-twenty, and as fine a young fellow as you'd find."

"I mean what business does he follow?"

"He's a soldier."

Worse and worse. What could be more unsuitable to a refined, delicately-nurtured young heiress than an alliance with a rough private soldier?

"He's sure to get on," said his sister, defiantly. "I shouldn't wonder if he were President of the States before he dies! You'd better think of it, Lord Dunmore. I don't want to be hard on you; I'll give you till to-night to think of it. I shall sleep at the hotel, and not leave till nine to-morrow morning. Now listen." She ticked off the various items on her fingers as though to impress them upon him. "Three hundred a year for me all my days, and your daughter for Jim; a kind welcome when the lad comes to you next year, and a wedding before your daughter's twenty-

one! There's no great hardship in that, I think, and you needn't send me any long, legal kind of letter that maybe I couldn't make out. Just write the one word on a blank sheet of paper—yes or no—and I shall understand well enough what it means. One thing more—you'll have to send me your address regularly every month. I don't want you to give me the slip."

Lord Dunmore spent that whole evening shut up alone in his study. About nine he rung his bell, and sent for Susan.

"I want you to take this letter with your own hands to the hotel. Don't trust it to anyone, not even Henri. Ask to see Mrs. Pearson, and give it her yourself. It is a matter of life and death."

## CHAPTER II.

THAT self-same June evening, which brought so much trouble and grief to the Earl of Dunmore, far from the pleasant villa on the French coast, in a genteel side street of fashionable London was a compact semi-detached residence, to which some years before the Honourable Thomas Glenarvon's family had removed.

Not the Honourable Thomas himself, be it understood. He had taken a longer journey than any to be accomplished, accompanied by worldly goods. Ten years after his quarrel with his brother he found himself on his death-bed. His wife declared there was nothing the matter with him but a cold; the gold-spectacled doctor she called in pronounced the same verdict, but Thomas Glenarvon knew better. He had a fixed certainty he was about to depart to that bourne from whence no traveller returns.

"Denis," he said to his eldest son, who had been a curly-headed urchin in petticoats when Lord Dunmore wronged the whole family by daring to undertake matrimony on his own account, "Denis, do you know I'm going away?"

Denis was, fourteen, then a bright-eyed, careless schoolboy. His face grew grave as he bent over his father, whom he loved better than any human creature.

"Don't say that," he pleaded.

"It's true enough. Sit down, lad. I won't talk to you. Where's your mother?"

"Gone to a party with the girls," said Denis, simply; "she does not know how ill you are, or she could not have done it."

Thomas Glenarvon smiled faintly; he rather doubted him.

"I am not sorry to have you alone, Denis, I want to talk to you."

Denis wondered what about! Perhaps his dark eyes asked the question, for his father went on,—

"I suppose you do not remember your uncle?"

"Uncle Wellwyn?"

"No—my only brother, the Earl of Dunmore."

Denis grew astonished, his dark eyes flashed.

"The man who made us poor, who keeps all the property you ought to have? No, father, I can't remember him, and I don't want to."

"Denis," said his father gravely, "who told you that?"

"Mamma; she is always—"

"Hush!" said Mr. Glenarvon quickly. "Denis, do you know that now I am on my death-bed the one thing I regret most is my rupture with my brother. I would give half my remaining space of life to shake his hand."

"But papa—"

"You have taken your mother's view, yet you do not generally think with her."

"I thought it was your view, father?"

"Have you ever heard me speak against my brother, Denis?"

"Never, but—"

"I quarrelled with him! I said the cruellest things brother did say to brother; but, Denis, I was led to do this by your mother. Before I

die I want you to understand how the feud, as she calls it, came about; and I tell you that Guy never in his life sought to wrong me or mine."

"Ought you to talk so much?" hazarded Denis.

"Talking won't hurt me, and I must tell you. I have a kind of presentiment that some day you will meet your uncle, and I should like you to know the truth."

"There was only a year between us," he began slowly, "and I think no brothers ever loved more than we did. I was twenty-eight when I met your mother, and I think from the first Guy saw how it would be. I was in the army then, and I had a younger son's portion; altogether my income was twelve hundred a year. Your mother was portionless. I was looked on by her friends as a very good match, and we were married."

He paused. Perhaps he was thinking how he could best tell the story to Denis without casting too much blame on the boy's mother.

"Children came to us, our expenses increased, but Guy's generosity was such we still seemed rich. We spent the summer always at the Towers, your mother acting in all respects as though she were its mistress."

"Guy was always making us handsome presents. He seemed unlikely to marry. Denis, by the time you were born your mother had decided he never would marry, and that you were as surely heir to the Earldom of Dunmore as though you had been born Lord Glenarvon."

Denis stared.

"But then how did the Earl injure us? I always thought he downright robbed us."

"He did not, Denis. You were four years old when he told me he was engaged; his bride was young and portionless. What right had I to reproach him with that when your mother had been so too? If he chose to marry a girl many years his junior it was no business of ours, but your mother was furious. She had set her hopes of being a countess, of seeing her children my lord and my lady; she raved at Dunmore, she cast evil aspersions on his poor young fiancée. I could not go against my wife—I had to choose between her and my brother. Guy was angry, too, and so a regular quarrel ensued. We have never spoken since."

"But it seems to me," the boy's sensitive brow flushed, "the Earl did us no harm."

"He simply exercised his right to marry if he pleased. Denis, how I have missed him no one knows—not only his substantial aid but his kindly sympathy. It has aged me before my time. I am but little over fifty, and yet I seem like an old man through this miserable feud."

"But can't you write to Lord Dunmore?"

He shook his head.

"I must consider your mother. No, Denis, all I want is that you should never cherish an unkind thought towards your uncle; that some day, if fate ever brings you together, you may tell him I loved him to the last."

"Is he at Glenarvon?"

"Oh, no, he is travelling. The Countess died within two years of her marriage. There is but one child—Lady May; I should like to have seen her. I pray Guy may live to see her grow up to womanhood, for, poor child, she has no one else to look to in the whole world."

"Poor little thing."

"I think your mother hates her," went on the invalid. "All the unkind feelings she cherished for the child's mother have descended to the little orphan. Your mother can never forget that this child of eight stands between you and the coronet of Dunmore."

"I don't want it. I would rather be plain Mr. Glenarvon as you have been since you left the army, papa."

"I often wish, for your sake, I never had left. You will be badly off, my boy; we have run into many expenses, and debts have accumulated since the feud. When all is paid there will be nothing but your mother's jointure of

eight hundred a-year, and the interest of the sum your godfather gave you for a christening present."

"Who was my godfather?"

"Surely you know that; Your uncle, of course. His present to you was a cheque for five thousand pounds. It is settled on you so that the capital cannot be touched, and as long as you live you have an income of two hundred pounds a-year. I'm glad of it; Denis, I shouldn't like you to be dependent on your mother."

Within a week of that conversation Thomas Glenarvon died. His widow did not even condescend to send an intimation to the Earl. She removed with her children to a smaller house. She would have liked to take Denis from Eton, but her husband had left two trustees to see to his boy's interests, and these gentlemen declared their intention of giving their ward a liberal education. His mother had very little chance of fingering his money at present.

And then ten years sped by, bringing Denis Glenarvon to the age of twenty-four, and finding the family still in the small, semi-detached house, and the six Miss Glenarvons still disengaged and apparently without the least chance of ever becoming otherwise; for the youngest of them was twenty-six, and after that age portionless damsels, undowered by nature with unusual beauty, are apt to become unappropriated goods in the matrimonial market.

It was June. The same evening, when May and her father received a visit from Mrs. Pearson, Denis Glenarvon was in his studio, putting the last touches on a landscape, for after Eton and Oxford days were over the young man had chosen his profession, and stuck to it. He was an artist, and critics said one of great promise. He was a strikingly handsome man, very like his dead father. He was very popular in society; but only son and brother though he was in his home circle Denis had little love and appreciation.

It was not his fault. A more dutiful son, a tenderer brother, would have been hard to find; but somehow his ways and thoughts were very different from those of the feminine portion of his family. He hated shams, and, truth to say, Mrs. Glenarvon and her daughters were rather given to these expedients. Denis took after his father, and the consequence was that since that father's death, despite the fact that he had a mother and six sisters, he had often felt almost alone in the world.

As he put the last touch to his picture he gave a little sigh—perhaps that there was no one to listen to his dreams of fame and sympathise with them. The sigh was drowned in the rustle of a silken train, and a minute later the door of the studio opened to admit the stately form of Mrs. Glenarvon.

You think, perhaps, she had come to give her son a little cheering conversation, to admire his work. Not a bit of it. She seldom journeyed up the steep staircase which led to the studio, and when she did so the object was a selfish one.

Denis guessed what she wanted, but he placed her a chair respectfully. Her blue silk train floated over the bare boards, her pink headress seemed out of place. She was not sixty yet, and she had long ago given up all semblance of mourning for her husband.

"Really, Denis"—her first words were usually a complaint—"you need not have given me the trouble of toiling all this way upstairs. You might have known I wanted to speak to you."

"I should have been down in another hour. I thought you had gone to the opera."

"The box Mrs. Jenkins sent only holds six."

"It was very good-natured of her to send it."

"Oh, I don't know. She owes us a great deal—a tallow chandler's wife, where would her position in society be if we had not taken her up?"

"Where would the girls' amusements be if

she did not provide them? I don't think the generosity is all on our side, mother."

"You always abuse your own family."

"Do I?" a little wearily. "What had you to say to me, mother? I was thinking of going out."

"I want to speak to you"—she glanced apprehensively at the door—"Denis, I can't go on like this much longer—I am awfully in debt."

"That has been the case a long time, I fear, mother," he said, gravely.

"I heard you had sold that picture"—she pointed to the still wet canvas—"is it true?"

"Perfectly. I shall send it to be framed to-morrow. The purchaser is Lord Arundel."

"And he gave you five hundred pounds for it?"

"Indeed!" said Denis, lightly; "confess, mother, my choice of a profession was not such a bad one."

"Denis," she said, feverishly, "you must let me have that money, you really must. With five hundred pounds I could tide over the present."

"I cannot let you have it, mother."

"You must."

"I cannot."

"Say will not."

"Will not, then," he rejoined, fiercely. "It would be of no use; if you go on living at a rate of expenditure much above your income ruin must come."

"It will come if you refuse me this."

"Not if you are prudent."

"What do you call prudent?"

"There is that pretty cottage my father bought in Kent; it would hold you and the girls nicely. Your income would be richer there even after deducting one or two thousands from the principal to pay your debts."

"Denis, you are a monster!"

"I hope not."

"You are my only son, and you won't stretch out a hand to help me."

"Not while your whole life is one gigantic sham, mother. I have helped you, I pay two hundred a year for the use of this garret. Of all the household I am the least studied. I ask you, would any other young man stand the treatment meted out to me here?"

"Go on, abuse your mother; you'll be saying next you want to leave me."

"I think I said that last Christmas. I gave you timely notices then. I mean to abide by it."

"Denis!"

"Mother," and the young man's voice softened, "do give up this reckless extravagance."

"I mean to as soon as the girls are married."

"They are not likely to marry now. Mother, be persuaded; let me refurnish Combe Cottage for you, and make it a comfortable home, then wind up things here and live in peace and honour."

"Do you mean I live in dishonour here?"

"Is it honourable to incur debts you have no chance of paying?"

"Why not give me the money you would spend on that absurd cottage?"

"It would only be dropping it into the sea. Mother, for my father's sake, be persuaded."

But she shook off his appealing hand.

"I mean to do my duty to my poor girls. I shall not listen to you—you always were a croaker."

"Well, next week you will be rid of me."

And on the twenty-fourth, with a sore heart, Denis Glenarvon removed to a quiet house near Chelsea, where a poverty-stricken widow deemed herself very fortunate to obtain him as a lodger; but Mrs. Glenarvon had not counted on what followed the instant her son was gone. The moment they knew he would not be answerable for their bills Mrs. Glenarvon's tradespeople sent her daily appeals for money; and, greatest humiliation of all, a distress for rent was actually placed in the semi-detached house.

The widow sent a peremptory summons for

Denis, and in her bad luck (as she called it) had no alternative but to accept his former offer.

Within a month she and her six girls were settled in the despoiled cottage, her income reduced by one-fourth, but still with a peace to which she had long been a stranger. For henceforward, like Longfellow's village blacksmith, she "could look the whole world in the face," for she "owed not any man."

It had cost Denis nearly the whole of the money he had received for his picture to settle his family in their new home. He had received no thanks, nothing but reproaches, in return, and, young as he was, he felt strangely dispirited and down when he was back in his Chelsea lodgings.

He was getting on in his profession. He had no fears but what he would one day be famous. His mother had coolly told him he had better make over his godfather's present to her and his sisters, for she was sure he had no need of it.

Denis told her gently he could not do so; the money was not his to alienate or dispose of. Then she told him, with a sneer on her face, she supposed he thought of marrying.

"Some country girl, with no style or manners, and not a halfpenny of fortune. You're just like your Uncle Dunmore, and you'll make just such a fool of yourself."

"I don't think you brought my father any fortune," said Denis, stung for once into defending himself, "yet I never heard him called a fool for marrying you."

"You are just like your uncle. There's nothing of the Wellwyns about you, Denis."

Denis kept silent.

"There's my brother, now," went on Mrs. Glenarvon, "with a good two thousand a-year of his own, and no one but Grace to come after him. If you had a grain of common sense, Denis, you'd propose to Grace at once."

"But I don't admire her."

"Perhaps you admire someone else, some theatrical-looking professional model, I dare say!"

Denis bit his lips, and kept silence till he had conquered himself to answer patiently,—

"I have never yet met a woman I should care to marry. I shall not marry until I am in love, and I am very sure I shall never love her."

"What a loss for her!" said his mother, spitefully.

Poor Denis! Mr. Wellwyn was his mother's only brother, and very like her. He had never stretched out a finger to help her in her difficulties.

He never invited one of her six girls to Wellwyn House; but he was at all times gracious to her son. Denis Glenarvon was always a welcome guest at the large red-brick mansion, and both Grace and her parents delighted to see him there.

"The lad's as fine a fellow as ever breathed," the father would say to the mother in the privacy of their own room during a conjugal chat in the dark. "At the worst he'll be a famous painter, and have a large fortune; at the best he'll be Earl of Dunmore and master of Glenarvon Towers."

"Dear, dear!" responded the wife of his bosom, "is there any chance of that? I'm sure if I'd known it I'd have been more friendly to your sister and all those gawky girls."

"That's no consequence," said Wellwyn, loftily. "My sister's day is over. She and the girls 'd be no better off—unless Denis was foolish and helped them; but there's only one child's life between him and the earldom. I often wonder if he ever thinks of it."

"I am sure he does not."

"And is the life a sound one?"

"I can't say. She's a mere slip of a girl, and her mother died in decline. She's been bred up in foreign parts, which looks as though they thought she inherited the disease. I'd like to see Grace a countess



well enough; but, early or no early, I'd be very glad to have Denis for a son-in-law, and I'd think my girl lucky to have him for a husband."

But Denis showed no signs of wishing her for a wife. He spent a fortnight with his relations very soon after his family's migration to Coombe Cottage, but he never paid his cousin any particular attention, and when he left he expressly said he feared it would be a long time before he returned to Wellwyn House, as he meant to spend the autumn and winter abroad for professional purposes.

"You'll be a great man yet," said old Wellwyn, shaking him by the hand. "Your father would have been proud of you, Denis, my boy, had he only lived to see you grow up."

"Don't bring home a foreign wife," said his aunt, with a kindly thought of Grace. "It is such a disadvantage to an Englishman, and you know, Denis, artists so often make unlucky marriages."

Denis smiled. "I don't think there's any danger, aunt; I'm not a ladies' man."

And three days later our hero left London for Harwich, crossed to Antwerp, wandered for some time very pleasantly in Flanders and Belgium; and finally, when the first tints of brown warned the eye of the beginning of autumn, took up his abode in a quaint little German village on the banks of the Rhine which rejoiced in the strange-sounding name of Konigsmagd.

The name translated into English means king's maiden, and there was an old legend connected with the place, which said that a beautiful girl had there been offered to an old German monarch as hostage for her father's ransom. She was so lovely and so unhappy, runs the legend, that the king's son fell in love with her. His father set her free; they were married, and took up their abode in a magnificent castle built on the very spot where she had said good-bye to her native land.

Denis had read the legend in a book, and thought the scene would make a fine picture. Already he had decided the scene—the body of rough warriors, the king a little in advance, the maiden led by her father to present to him, in the distance her weeping friends, and at the king's side, already looking at her with tender glances, the prince who was to turn her sorrow into joy.

Denis believed this picture would take the world by storm. He found the exact spot described in the legend—a little knoll surrounded by trees. All trace of the castle had passed away, but that mattered nothing to the artist; it was the scenery he needed, not the ruins. He meant to stay at Konigsmagd until his picture was completed all but the heroine. He would not hope to find a face fit for such a character in the obscure little German village.

For, in truth, Konigsmagd was so small and so obscure that many people living not fifty miles off ignored its very existence. Just a winding, irregular street, a score or so of picturesque houses, a rustic inn—that was all.

All? Well, not quite. At the end of the village street—almost hidden in a garden well planted with grand old trees—was a house a little better than the rest, a pretty, two-storied building, equal perhaps in size and comfort to an ordinary eight-roomed English cottage. The place was always let to visitors, and just now Mr. Thomas (Denis always travelled under his second Christian name, so little known to his intimates that few of them knew he had been christened after his father) was informed it was let to an English nobleman and his daughter.

Denis never cared for gossip; the news did not concern him, and was soon forgotten. He devoted himself heart and soul to his picture, and the fact that some fellow-countryman was staying at the Konigshaus, as it was grandiloquently named, was nothing to him. He did not even wonder what charm the

quaint, old German village would have for his compatriot.

But he had not been in Konigsmagd a fortnight when an accident happened, which was to bring him into close intimacy with these compatriots, and link his fate with theirs for ever. It was late September; Denis had sat all day over his painting, and was going home to his modest quarters at the inn in the twilight. He walked quickly on.

Very soon the first part of his great work would be achieved, the beautiful German scenery transferred to his canvas, and his thoughts be free to wander after models for the characters he wished to represent. He was almost lost in thought when a voice fell on his ear, an English voice, and that, as it seemed to him, of some one in distress.

"Help! help!"

He looked up, and saw a respectable, elderly woman coming towards him wringing her hands.

Courteous as ever, Denis raised his hat, and begged to learn what was the matter.

"I have lost my young lady, sir. We had been gathering flowers on the hilltop, and I sat down to rest. She promised to be back in a few minutes. That is two hours ago, and I have seen nothing of her."

She has doubtless gone home."

The woman shook her head.

"She could not have gone home, sir, without passing me. I have been sitting just at the point where the four paths from the hill meet. She must have lost her way on those dreadful moors."

Denis felt alarmed; beyond the mound where he encamped for his painting stretched two or three miles of barren, trackless ground. It was covered with a carpet of heather—nothing else would grow there. There was no beaten track; tourists seldom passed beyond the mound. If a young girl were, indeed, wandering over that wild, barren moorland she had little chance of finding her way in the gathering darkness.

"If you will sit down here," opening his camp-stool, "I can go further and search for your young lady. It is getting late, and no wonder you are frightened at her delay."

"I daren't go home without her. I think it would just kill the master. She is the very light of his eyes. Oh, sir, Heaven bless you for your kindness!"

"You are very welcome."

But his mind misgave him as he clambered higher and higher and saw no trace of the missing girl. If he failed to find her it seemed to him she must perish on these moors.

He had almost given up hope when in the distance he saw something white lying on the ground. A nameless dread filled his heart as he got nearer; he seemed to know by instinct what it was lying so gently there.

To his life's end Denis never forgot that moment. A young girl in the first bloom of womanhood, beautiful with all the loveliness of youth and purity, stretched upon the purple heather, her white dress not whiter than her upturned face.

Very gently Denis knelt down by her side, and taking his flask from his pocket, poured a few drops of wine between her clenched teeth. Another moment, and she opened her eyes—such lovely eyes; they seemed to Denis to read him through and through.

"Where am I?"

"On the moors. I met your maid just now in great distress. I told her you had probably lost your way."

"It was not that."

"What then?"

"I have twisted my foot in a hollow. I can't walk a step. I remember trying to stand, but the pain was so great I fainted."

Denis felt thankful he had found her. Why, she might have lain for hours, perhaps days, undiscovered. Somehow he felt glad she should owe her safety to no one but himself.

"I am so thankful I found you."

"It was very kind of you to come. Poor Susan! she must be very frightened."

"She is, indeed. Even now I do not see how we are to reach her, unless you will allow me to carry you."

She blushed crimson.

"I am far too heavy."

"I can think of no better plan. You see, even if I felt sure of finding this spot again, and ventured to leave you and seek assistance, no carriage could come up this rugged hill, and the darkness would then be complete."

"The carriage will be waiting at the foot of the hill," said the girl, slowly; "but, indeed, I do not like to give you so much trouble."

He waited no further permission. He raised the slight form in his arms, and began his walk to where he had left the old servant waiting. Light as was his burden he had to walk very slowly, for the descent was steep and dangerous. Neither of them spoke. Her soft hair had escaped its coils, and fell in bright waves over his shoulders. She kept her eyes closed, but Denis could see the pure white brow, and admire with an artist's enthusiasm the perfect beauty of the face. The walk was strangely sweet to him, and he almost regretted the moment when they rejoined Susan.

A few words explained all to her, but it seemed to Denis she overrated his services, so intense was her gratitude to him.

"My master will thank you better than I can, sir," she said, with a choked sob, as Denis handed her into the pony-carriage, where he had already placed her young lady. "He will know how to thank you. She is all he has in the world, sir—his only child."

Denis thought a good deal of this adventure over his evening tea.

"They are great people, of course; the woman spoke of her master as 'my lord.' I suppose they are the family from Konigshaus. She has a lovely face; I should like to paint her."

It came on him with a sudden flash that this was the beauty he required for his picture; that just such violet eyes and chestnut hair would be his ideal German heroine.

"Perhaps I may call and inquire for her to-morrow," he thought, as he drained his last cup of tea. "But I daresay I'd better not; they might think it a liberty."

He had hardly finished tea when the sound of horses' hoofs were heard—a carriage was dashing up to the inn. Another moment, and the landlady ushered in a tall, soldierly man, who looked every inch an English nobleman, and carried himself erect and proudly, despite his sixty odd years.

He went straight up to Denis and wrung his hand.

"Sir," he said, in a voice which trembled in spite of his best endeavours, "I have come to thank you, to express a tithe of the gratitude I owe you. You have this day preserved the only thing I value—my child's life."

"I was only too glad to be of any use. I trust—"

"She is all right," interrupted his listener; "the doctor assures us the sprain will only be a very temporary matter. But, oh! Mr. Thomas, I tremble when I think of what might have happened had you not found her!"

He shuddered even as he spoke. Denis pressed him to be seated, and placed an easy chair near the stove.

"I must introduce myself," said his visitor, suddenly. "Your name I know already. I am the Earl of Dunmore, and the girl you have saved is my only child, the Lady May Glenarvon."

Denis felt his thoughts fly back through the lapse of years to that last long talk with his father; it had never been forgotten. Denis had long since learned to think of his uncle from his father's point of view. He was deeply moved to think that at last they stood face to face—that the girl he had saved from

death was his own cousin. For one moment he was tempted to reveal himself, then he decided that he had better keep his disguise for the present. He recovered his composure by an effort, and said, simply,—

"I beg your pardon, my lord; the name of Glenarvon is a very familiar one to me."

"You have friends who bear it, perhaps?"

"I had one friend; he was, I think, a near relation of yours—Thomas Glenarvon, once of the —th Regiment."

"He is my brother."

"Was," corrected Denis, gently. "Mr. Glenarvon has been dead these ten years."

"Dead!" the Earl's voice softened strangely. "You don't mean it, really? Tom can't be dead."

"He died, as I have told you, about ten years ago. I was very intimate with his family; I was staying in the house when he died."

"They might have sent me."

"He wished it," said Denis, in a low voice; "but as I was I remember that. He said the feud between you had been his wife's doing from first to last, and he desired his son, if ever you two should meet, to tell you that he died loving you to the last."

The Earl wiped his eyes.

"It was never Tom's fault," he said, slowly. "His wife was at the bottom of it—a wicked woman that, Mr. Thomas, aye, and a cruel one."

Although she was his own mother Denis did not deny this charge. He knew quite well that Mrs. Glenarvon had spoiled her husband's life, just as he knew she would have ruined her son's.

"You must come and see us, Mr. Thomas," said the peer, recovering his composure. "There is a double reason now for our being friends. You have saved my daughter's life, and you have brought me a message of reconciliation. You must spend all your leisure with us. Mab will be delighted to make acquaintance with her preserver."

Denis saw very late that night thinking. He had taken a great fancy to his uncle—his heart had gone out to Lord Dunmore in that one interview as it had never gone out to the Wellwyns after years of intimacy. He felt that he could look upon the Earl almost as a father, and he would have been delighted at the prospect of winning his friendship but for one misgiving.

Denis was twenty-four. He had come to Konigsmagd perfectly heart-whole and fancy free. He had never cared for any woman in his life—what was more, he believed he never should so care. Half-an-hour of May Glenarvon's presence had done its work—it was a case of love at first sight. Before ever he discovered her name and lineage he had known that in all the wide world she was the only one for him.

She was the Lady May, the future Countess of Dunmore! He was a landscape painter, whose utmost exertions would win, perhaps, a tithe of the enormous fortune one day to be hers. He never could be a "suitable" match for his lovely cousin. He was too proud to brook the chance of being called a fortune-hunter—therefore it seemed to him farther intercourse with his uncle's heiress could bring him nothing but misery. He would make his painting an excuse, and see no more of sweet Lady May.

Alas for human prudence and its wise resolutions! Denis went to bed determined to run no danger from his cousin's fascinations. He awoke on a lovely autumnal morning with but one thought, one hope—how soon could he see May again? After all, he argued to himself, the risk was his, the suffering would be his and his only. He could guard against his secret manfully, and it would be churlish to refuse Lord Dunmore's hospitality. Denises con- sidered caution, and that very afternoon he set off to call at the Konigshauss.

He was received with a hearty welcome. Lord Dunmore and his daughter had that peculiar gift so precious in a foreign land of making their guests feel at home at once. In

an hour's time Denis had forgotten they were strangers. The Earl's voice seemed to recall his boyhood, and the kindly father he had so missed; and as for May, although he had seen three London seasons, and been a favourite with the beauties who appeared in Belgravia, yet he decided he had never met anyone so fascinating, so captivating, as his little cousin.

Lord Dunmore "took to" Mr. Thomas at once. A reserved and haughty man, who admitted few strangers to his intimacy, he received the young artist at first from simple gratitude, and then, to his own surprise, found the gratitude ripening into affection.

"Your father must be proud of you," he said to Denis once, when he and May had been allowed to inspect the great picture. "I should like to know him, and congratulate him on his son's talents."

Denis sighed.

"My father has been dead for years, Lord Dunmore; and I am, I grieve to confess, anything but a source of pride to my mother. No efforts of mine can convince her that painting is respectable. I honestly think she really believes me to be on a par with the decorator who emblazons the names of tradesmen over their shops, or adorns the sign of a country inn."

"Is it possible?"

"Unfortunately, yes! My poor mother has had many disappointments in her life, and they have tried me sadly; but for that she might have had more sympathy with what she terms my 'folly.'"

"Have you any brothers?"

"No. I have six sisters, though, all older than myself."

"Six sisters?"

"Yes, and unmarried."

Lord Dunmore smiled.

"I think, then, I can guess one of your mother's disappointments. I don't know how it is, but mothers always seem to me to want to get rid of their girls. I can't understand it myself. If I could I would keep my May with me all my life."

His tone showed his sincerity. Denis felt a strange longing to know whether Lady May would approve of such an arrangement. Perhaps his eyes betrayed his question, for the Earl answered,—

"I don't think she would mind either, poor child; but it can't be. We all have our troubles."

This speech was, to say the least, enigmatical. It seemed to suggest that Lady May was engaged, yet there was nothing to colour such an idea—the pretty left hand was bare of rings. Lady May never had a letter, apparently never wrote one, and seemed utterly ignorant of any love save that she bore for her father.

It was easy to see the two were all the world to each other; but as he knew them better Denis perceived that May was not only her father's pride—she was his anxiety. The Earl seemed haunted by some dreadful fear; some secret trouble weighed heavily upon him, and Denis felt by instinct that the fear and trouble both concerned his sweet violet-eyed daughter.

Susan Norton was in his confidence, it was easy to see that. She, too, looked at May sometimes with a strange pity, as though her heart ached for her; but the girl herself was unconscious of their fears. She was fearless and free from sorrow as the little birds, and each day that passed found poor Denis more and more hopelessly in love with her.

Lord Dunmore saw nothing of the romance going on under his very eyes. May in her innocence never guessed what made the world so strangely sweet and fair; but some one else saw all.

Susan Norton had not lived to be middle-aged without acquiring a very keen sight for all that concerned those she loved. She liked the young artist, and she understood his hopes as well as if she had been told them; but she knew also they were all in vain, and she felt

it was only cruel kindness to let him ignore this.

He was working at his picture one mild November day when he saw Lord Dunmore's housekeeper coming towards him. He had almost finished his work for the afternoon, and perhaps he was not sorry to be interrupted. Mrs. Norton was not the rose, but at least she lived near it. She would talk to him of Lady May, and no other subject was so sweet just now to Denis.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Norton. Are you here alone?"

"Yes, sir," returned Susan, quietly. "Lord Dunmore has a headache this afternoon, and my lady is reading to him, and—I wanted to speak to you."

Denis dropped his brush in his surprise at her last words. The old woman's manner was perfectly respectful, and yet he felt she had nothing pleasant to tell him.

"Sit down," he said, good-naturedly. "You must be tired after climbing up this hill, and I am quite ready to hear all you have to say."

"You'll forgive me if I seem to be asking a liberty, sir," she said, gently, "but I feel for Lady May more than many do for their own children. You see, I've brought up from a baby; her mother died in my arms."

"You may be quite sure I shall not be offended at anything you say," said Denis, kindly. "Anyone can see how well you love Lady May."

"And, sir, love makes one keen-sighted, and I've thought lately you had grown to care for her. It's but natural, seeing you saved her life. But, oh! Mr. Thomas, nothing but harm can come of it, and so I've made bold to come to you and beg you to go away before you break my darling's heart."

"I would never break her heart, Mrs. Norton. Can't you see the danger is mine, not hers?"

Susan shook her head.

"It's not that I mistrust, sir, but I'm afraid for my child. She's not used to gentlemen's society; and what if she grew to care for you?"

Denis flushed crimson.

"Have no fear, I assure you I should not attempt to win Lord Dunmore's heiress. I am only an artist, but I have my pride. No man shall ever have it in his power to call me a fortune hunter."

"You don't understand," said poor Susan, faintly. "I'll have to speak plainer, only promise me you'll keep the secret. I can trust you, sir?"

"You may trust me safely."

"You're thinking, sir, it was the difference of fortune I meant when I said no good could come of your caring for my lady. It wasn't that I meant; there's a barrier between you no money could get over."

"Perhaps you mean title," and Denis finished haughtily.

"If you were a duke, sir, I'd tell you just the same. Lady May is engaged to be married."

"Engaged to be married!"

Each of the words cut Denis to the heart. Only now did he realise that, in spite of all difficulties, he had hoped May might be his.

"She is nineteen," went on Susan, "and she must be married before she's twenty-one. My lord's word is passed; and, oh! Mr. Thomas, more depends on it than you can guess. It would just break her father's heart if she refused to redeem the truth."

A lump came in the young man's throat; he could hardly frame his questions.

"Does she love him?"

"She has never seen him."

In spite of all Denis felt unutterably relieved.

"I can't understand it," he said, in a puzzled tone. "She has never seen him; and yet Lord Dunmore, who is an adoring father, insists upon the marriage! It is unheard of!"

"It is the truth, sir."

"I suppose it is a splendid match?"



"I don't know, sir."  
"And will he make her a good husband? Is he worthy of such a wife?"

"I can't say, sir. I have told you, perhaps, more than I ought, only I felt I could trust you; and, sir, you have a strange resemblance to the Glenarvons. I couldn't bear your life should be wrecked without a word of warning."

"And you think this engagement will be carried out? Suppose Lady May disliked her fiancé when they met, what then?"

Susan sighed.

"She must marry him, sir. I daren't speak more plainly; there is a secret mixed up in it that I can't tell you. Honour, safety, obedience—all required that Lady May should wed the man of her father's choice; and she will do it, too, even though her own heart should break."

Denis looked straight into the old woman's honest face. He felt she was to be trusted. He knew she had come to him in all kindness.

"Mrs. Norton," he said, "I know you meant well to me, but I can't follow your advice. I will never betray my love; I will never speak a word to May Glenarvon. The whole world, her friends among them, might not hear; but I could not go away and leave her; I could not bear to go away while this strange mystery shadowed her fate. Something tells me this man is unworthy of her. Who but a coward would compel a girl he had never seen to promise to marry him? Until Lady May is another's wife I will not lose sight of her. Something whispers to me she may yet need a true heart and honest friendship."

"If it were only friendship, sir!"

"She shall never learn it is aught else. I can trust myself, Mrs. Norton."

"And you are not angry with me, sir?"

"No," said Denis, gravely, "I can't be that; only you have brought me news that seems to crush the very life out of me—the life and hope!"

"You are young," she said, deprecatingly. "You'll get over it, sir, in time."

"I think not. I come of a race who never love twice, Mrs. Norton. Our very motto is, 'once and for always.'"

He had forgotten his indignation—for gotten that as an old retainer of the Glenarvons she would at once recognise this motto, but was not prepared for the white, startled face she turned upon him as he spoke for her excited answer.

"Sir, for the love of Heaven, tell me what you mean? Have you been deceiving us? Aren't you really Mr. Thomas?"

"I've never deceived anyone in my life. I have always travelled under the name of Thomas."

"But your real name—your true name? Oh, I know it before you tell me! I can guess why you brought back my lord's family to my mind."

"It was natural," he said, simply. "I will trust you, Mrs. Norton, and tell you my secret, as you have confided yours to me. I am Denis Glenarvon, Lady May's first cousin!"

And of all replies the one she made was the least expected. She just clasped her hands, and said, faintly,—

"Thank Heaven!"

### CHAPTER III.

It was mystery on mystery. Mr. Denis Glenarvon, having made up his mind that in the event of suffering coming from his intercourse with his cousin he should be the one to bear it, gave up nothing of his intimacy with Lord Dunmore and his daughter; and the more he saw of them the more certain he felt that if Mrs. Norton's tale was true May ignored her destiny. It was impossible to believe she could have been as blithe and light-hearted had she known the fate which hung over her.

The Earl was often moody, and at all times sad. It needed no magician to see that a heavy sorrow was crushing him beneath its weight, but May was as bright and joyous as a child.

Just a week from his interview with Susan Norton, and "Mr. Thomas" received an extremely peculiar letter. It was written on cream-laid paper, in somewhat uncertain characters, but its contents were brief and to the purpose.

"I have heard you are wooing Lord Dunmore's daughter. For her sake and your own beware! There is only one man in all the world whom May Glenarvon may safely marry, and he is in America.—Your well-wisher,

"MARY PEARSON."

Denis was so puzzled by this extraordinary missive that he could not keep his doubts to himself. He felt he must speak to Lord Dunmore.

The opportunity soon came. That very evening, when he was playing chess with the Earl, his inattention and abstracted air attracted Lord Dunmore's notice, and he asked the cause.

"What is the matter with you, Thomas? You are playing abominably to-night."

"I must plead guilty," said Denis, lightly.

"I received a very strange letter this morning, and I can't get it out of my head."

"I hope you have had no bad news."

"I have had no news of any sort—simply a kind of warning—I may almost say a kind of threat."

"From whom?"

"A woman whose name I never even heard to my own knowledge. The letter comes from Mary Pearson."

Crash! Over went the chess-table. The men lay scattered on the floor, and the Earl turned to Mr. Thomas, his face livid with a nameless terror.

"What did she say to you?"

For a moment Denis hesitated, and the old man went on, excitedly,—

"For the love of Heaven tell me! Surely I have a right to ask that much. Did she betray my secret?"

"I will show you the letter," said Denis, simply, "only asking you to remember two things. Mrs. Pearson is a complete stranger to me, and I have never abused the trust you placed in me when you invited me to your house, and made me the companion of your only child."

But Lord Dunmore was not listening. His hand was stretched out for the letter. He seized it almost ferociously, and turned aside to study its contents.

A minute passed—two, three; then he returned Mrs. Pearson's note to its true owner.

"Well!"

Denis looked at him. What did he mean by that short, inquiring monosyllable?

"Well," repeated Lord Dunmore, "what puzzles you? It seems to me the matter is plain enough. Someone has told Mrs. Pearson—wrongly, of course—that you are paying your addresses to my daughter, and she hastens to warn you of Lady May's engagement."

"But is Lady May engaged?"

"Assuredly," said the Earl, speaking still with the same feverish eagerness. "She is betrothed to the brother of your correspondent, a young American captain. I expect him over in the spring."

Whatever fear had troubled the Earl was lulled to rest now.

Denis decided Mrs. Pearson knew the strange secret at which Mrs. Norton had hinted, and his uncle had fancied she betrayed it in this letter.

"I am very much surprised."

"Why?" asked Lord Dunmore, sharply. "She is nearly twenty. Everyone will tell you May is old enough to be married, much more engaged."

"She never speaks of Captain Pearson."

"She is of a reserved disposition."

"She wears no engagement ring."

"I believe it is not an American custom."

The two men looked at each other, and understood their opponent's tactics.

Denis knew that for some unknown reason Lord Dunmore meant his daughter to marry Captain Pearson at any cost.

Her father saw that the man who had saved May's life had learned to love her madly.

The older man was the first to speak.

"I am sorry to seem harsh. Your bravery I can never forget, but I have been rash in throwing you into such close intimacy with my daughter. Until my child is Lady May Pearson I must beg you to cease your visits."

"Can't you trust me?" asked Denis, bitterly. "If I swear never to speak to her a word of love surely you will not cut me off from her society?"

"I must."

"Why?"

"Because," Lord Dunmore smiled half sadly, "I must have been blind not to think of it before. Your face and manners are well suited to win a young girl's fancy. For May's own sake I cannot let this intimacy go on."

"But she is engaged; surely you do not doubt my faith?"

"The engagement is one of *convenience*," Lord Dunmore condescended to explain.

"Is Captain Pearson rich?"

"He has not an enormous fortune. What does that matter? May is an heiress."

"It matters this, that I love her as my own soul. I have no fortune, Lord Dunmore, but I have a clear head and two strong arms. I would work for my wife with the best of weapons, perseverance and good will. Already I have a fair income; in the future I may be rich."

"My daughter is engaged."

"But not—you admit—by her own free will. Oh, Lord Dunmore! Have mercy on me. I love her as my own soul. Leave your property to charities, throw it into the sea. I don't want it; all I ask is Lady May. If she came to me without a farthing I should think myself rich to win her. With her by my side I could defy the world."

White as marble had grown the old man's face; he was deeply moved by the appeal made to him. For one instant he hesitated. Would not love such as this secure May's happiness better than wealth and honours if Jim Pearson must be attached to them? For one instant he thought of yielding, then he remembered that he had not to think only of May but of her mother, of his dear, dead wife. All sign of relenting vanished as he recalled this; his voice grew hard and cold.

"You have had your answer, sir."

"Lord Dunmore," pleaded Denis, "only promise me this. If Captain Pearson, after a fair trial, fail to please your daughter, will you then give me a different answer?"

"I cannot."

Denis rose reluctantly; he had spent many pleasant hours in that room, he might never see it again. His brief dream of happiness was dispelled, and yet he felt a strange reluctance to leave the home that sheltered his idol.

"We may not meet again, Lord Dunmore; in another month I shall probably leave Konis-magd. Our paths in life are widely severed; only, believe me, I sought your daughter for herself, not for her fortune. Had she lost every penny of it my wishes would have been the same."

Lord Dunmore wrung his hand.

"I am not likely to forget," he said, sadly.

"Mr. Thomas, you think me cruel and unjust, but I would have given you a different answer if I could. An awful fate compels me to act as I have done. I can explain nothing, I can tell nothing; only remember this—for well nigh twenty years my life has been one long pain; for the whole of May's life I have been struggling how to conquer the shadow that rested on my darling's fate and mine."

Another moment and Denis had left the

house, wondering a little even in his desolation whether his uncle would ever learn that the lover he had sent away was his own nephew.

Two days passed on—how slowly, how wearily! Then, as he was going home to his quarters at the *Tun*, Denis and his cousin met face to face.

It was a lonely spot, little troubled by passers-by; there was not a creature besides the two young people.

May came to a dead stop and held out her hand. Denis could see that she had been crying.

"Won't you speak to me, Mr. Thomas?"

He took her hand and held it in his own; he had much ado to prevent himself from giving her a warmer greeting.

"Papa says you are going away."

"Next week, I think."

"Have we offended you?" she asked, simply. "You have not been to see us for two days. I asked papa if he thought you would come to say good-bye, and he said no."

"Did he tell you why I stay away?"

"No."

"And can't you guess the reason?"

"Not unless we have offended you."

"I stay away at your father's request; he thinks he was unwise to let me be so often at his house."

"Why?"

"He fears I might desire the greatest treasure he has. Oh, Lady May! he was right, only the warning came too late. Before I knew that you were to be another's I had learned to love you more than aught else on earth."

Her face grew crimson, and yet there was no surprise in the beautiful violet eyes which drooped beneath his gaze.

"You love me!" she breathed gently; "you love me, Mr. Thomas?"

"Aye."

"And you call me another's! You must be mistaken. I never had a lover," here she blushed again, "in all my life! I never seemed to have room for anyone but papa in my heart until a little while ago."

"And now?"

Surely his eyes read her answer? But yet he wanted it in words, and so he persisted.

"And now?" he pleaded, in his rich, musical voice. "And now, May, could you make room there for me?"

Her voice sank to a whisper.

"I think I have loved you ever since—"

"Ever since what, sweetheart?"

"The evening you found me on the moors—when you saved my life."

Denis still held her hands in his. He was in no mind to let her go.

"Do you know that I am a shockingly bad match for you, child?" he said fondly.

"It doesn't matter!"

"And will you give Captain Pearson his *congé*, and wait until I am rich enough to aspire to be an earl's son-in-law?"

She looked troubled.

"I don't understand! Who is Captain Pearson? I don't know him."

"Have you never heard the name?"

She began to think.

"When we were in Normandy last June a Mrs. Pearson came to see papa. I fancy she was a bad, wicked woman. I know Susan would not let her see me. Papa seemed very sad and troubled after that. But we have heard nothing of her since, only on the first of every month papa sends her money."

"Is she an old woman?"

"I don't know. I think she was papa's servant once. She married and went to America."

"May, there must be some awful mystery in this! Your father told me you were engaged to Captain Pearson, an American officer."

May looked bewildered.

"And weeks ago your old Susan hinted to me your hand was disposed of. I would not accept her warning; I went on believing you free. I might never have given her words a

second thought, but that last Monday I had a letter from Mrs. Pearson."

"And she said—"

"She said I must not fall in love with you. I had done that already, though."

"Why not?"

"Because there was but one man you could safely marry, and he was in America."

"There is only one man I shall ever marry," said Lady May, decisively, "and he is not in America!"

Surely not, since he stood there at her side, devouring her hand with kisses!

"May, what shall we do?"

"Speak to papa. He never refused me anything I asked him in my life."

"May, darling, I know, I feel he will refuse you this—what then?"

"We can wait!" said May, bravely; "we are both young, and we can trust each other!"

"But Captain Pearson?"

May smiled.

"I cannot marry you without my father's consent," she said, firmly, "but, loving you, I cannot be anyone else's wife. I shall be May Glenarvon, always, dear, until you claim me!"

Denis shivered.

"Child, Heaven grant I have not done you a cruel wrong! I fear, something seems to tell me, you have much to bear!"

"To bear?" said May, indignantly. "You don't know my father. Why he has never given me even a harsh word in all my life."

"I pray I am mistaken!"

"I am sure you are!"

"I think he will force you to marry Captain Pearson, May; I feel it will be so!"

May drew herself up to her full height.

"Can't you trust me?"

"More than anything in the world, only I sorrow for the thought of the trouble I may have brought on your fair head."

She smiled into his eyes.

"You have brought me something else too—happiness! You can't think how sad I have been these two days, thinking I should never see you again!"

"You cared, then—"

"Cared?"

"May, will you kiss me?"

"No," she said, gravely, "we are not properly engaged yet, Mr. Thomas; we only mean to wait for each other."

"You must never call me that again!"

"Why not?"

It was on his lips to tell her the name was an assumed one, but he checked himself.

"I don't like 'Mister' from you."

"But I don't know what else to call you!"

He laughed, almost in spite of himself.

"Poor little May, to think I should have forgotten that! I was christened Denis, dear, and it will sound sweeter to me from your lips than it has ever done before!"

"Denis!" she repeated, ality. "I like the name. Denis, I must go home; let us say good-bye."

"But where am I to see you? How am I to learn what Lord Dunmore says to your confession?"

"I will write."

A little silence, then she spoke again,—

"Denis!"

"My own!"

"Are you quite sure?"

"Sure of what, dear?"

"If papa says 'no,' I can never marry you until he consents. I couldn't leave him in anger now he is old and feeble. Denis, it might be years before we could be anything to each other. Are you sure you will care to wait?"

"You are the star of my life now!" he murmured; "and I would rather wait until I was old and grey than fail to win you in the end for the queen of my home! We are both young, May; if your father persists in his refusal we must wait bravely until he relents. I can bear anything, dearest, so only that you are true to me!"

"I shall be that while life lasts!"

They parted there; another ten minutes and May stood on the threshold of her own home, a light in her eyes, a strange new joy written on every feature, a perfect picture girlish happiness and loving trust.

Susan met her in the hall, and it really looked as though her old eyes had shed many a tear in the lady's absence.

There's a gentleman come, my dear," she began, simply; "and your papa wishes you to dress at once and go down to the drawing-room."

May shivered. Save in the case of Mr. Thomas, Lord Dunmore had never shown himself very hospitable. In spite of her efforts Mab's thoughts would go to that story of Captain Pearson, and a strange presentiment would connect this unexpected guest with the man Denis said was her father's favoured future son-in-law.

"What is his name, nurse?"

They were upstairs now in May's own room; the girl was clad in floating robes of pink silk, trimmed with soft old lace, a string of rare pearls on her neck, white roses in her hair.

Susan seemed not to heed the question.

"Who is it, nurse?"

"It's a stranger, deary," said the old woman, in a strange, faltering voice; "one whose name even you have never heard."

"Is it Captain Pearson?"

Susan's whole frame shook.

"Dear, dear, child!" she said, brokenly; "have you known about it all this time, and yet can you be as happy as you look? Why, Lady May, many's the night I've cried myself to sleep just for thinking of this day."

"I don't understand," said May, in a strange, far-off sort of voice. "Susan, what do you mean? Tell me plainly who is the gentleman downstairs?"

"Captain Pearson, my lady," said Susan, quickly; "that is, he calls himself a captain. Anyhow, it's the man the Earl means you to marry."

May Glenarvon felt years older after that announcement. She was calm outwardly, but she could hear the throbbing of her own heart as she went forward to meet her father's guest.

A stout, thick-set young man, with a bullet-shaped head and a strong nasal accent—a man whose black clothes set on him as some foreign element, who used his knife in inappropriate places, distributed his "h's" entirely in the wrong direction, and hopelessly slaughtered the Queen's English; the kind of man whom nothing will make presentable.

He sat at Lord Dunmore's table looking infinitely less aristocratic than the butler; he made the most absurd mistakes in the observances of the table; he talked incessantly, and Lady May took heart. If the wooer had been eligible and irrefragable she might have trembled; but such a creature as this! Why, the sternest parent on earth could not force such a husband upon his daughter, and Lord Dunmore had ever been indulgent.

Only when the guest, confessing himself "done up" with his journey, had been conducted to his room, May lingered talking to her father. At first she spoke only of indifferent things, then suddenly she looked up into his face and asked him,—

"Papa, why did that man come here?"

"I asked him, May?"

"But why?"

A long, long silence; his hesitation redoubled her fears. Putting one hand on his arm and clinging to him nervously, she murmured,—

"Papa, tell me just this—you don't want him to marry me? Father, say just one word that I may know you did not want this. Oh! the very thought of it is awful."

But the word did not come, and looking up May saw a tear stealing slowly down the Earl's furrowed cheek.



## CHAPTER IV.

FACE to face they stood, the two who loved each other—May pale and downcast, Denis proud and happy. Captain Pearson's visit was a week old now, and the state of things at home was getting more than May could bear. She had met Denis this time by appointment, and now she was telling him why.

"I must say good-bye; I couldn't bear to leave you without a word."

"Good-bye!" he repeated, horror-struck.

"May, what are you thinking of, child?"

"We can never be anything to each other."

"You mean you are going to throw me over for Captain Pearson, I suppose."

"Don't be angry with me. Oh, Denis! I have enough to bear without harsh words from you."

"Sweetheart, tell me all, only first give me one word of hope. You won't marry this scorpion?"

"I shall never marry anyone."

"Never anyone but me," he corrected.

"May, I won't interrupt you again, I promise."

"I told papa last night I could never marry Captain Pearson. Oh, Denis! I shall never forget it; he was so angry. He told me that I was destroying his life work, that I was bringing a cruel reproach on my mother's memory, besides blighting my own future."

"And you answered?"

"That I would rather beg my bread from door to door than marry Captain Pearson. I told him so myself this morning—Captain Pearson, I mean—and now he has gone away, and papa says he will take his revenge."

"It shall not touch you, darling. You shall be my wife, and I will guard you from this villain's malice. You can trust me, May?"

"I can trust you."

"And you will be my wife?"

"I can never be anyone's wife. Oh! Denis, don't you understand? Can't you guess the secret Captain Pearson will reveal to all the world now we have angered him?"

"I only know this, May; no secret in all the world should part two people who love each other."

"But this is such a fearful one!"

"Tell it me."

She turned her face away, and then, very low, and with an agony of shame she began her story.

When my father married my mother she was not really Countess of Dunmore. He had, they say, another wife living. The mistake was repaired for my mother the day after this woman died. My parents were privately remarried, so that mamma died Lady Dunmore; but I—Denis, don't you understand what it means to me?"

"I understand; it removes the real obstacle between us. You are not a countess in prospective, and so it is not such a woful *misalliance* for you to marry a plain hard-working artist."

"Denis!"

"What else did you expect me to say, sweetheart?"

"Don't you see what it makes me?"

"It makes you the victim of a cruel mistake—that is all, even if it were true."

"It is true, Denis. I am not Lady May Glenarvon in the eyes of the law; I never have been."

Denis gathered her to himself.

"So that you are my wife, May, I don't mind what other title you bear."

She nestled in his arms, as though she had found her true resting-place at last.

"Denis!"

"What is it, May?"

"Do you know I think I'm glad?"

"Of what, child?"

"That it will all be found out. You see if I had been my father's heiress—if some day I had been called Lady Dunmore—I should have been stealing both title and estates from my cousin. If it weren't for the misery to papa and the disgrace I could be very thankful. I don't mind owing anything to you, and it

would be dreadful to steal a title and fortune never really mine."

"I don't think Mrs. Pearson will ever publish her story," said Denis, gravely. "In fact, I feel sure of it, May."

"Papa said she would go at once to the next heir, my uncle's only son."

"And then?"

"She would tell him, and he would come here to insist upon his rights."

"I don't think he will."

"I ought to be very miserable," said May, simply, "only I can't. Denis, I can't even feel unhappy while you love me."

"Then you will be happy always, dear," he replied, fondly; "for my love shall never fail you—never, while you live."

That evening Denis presented himself at the Koningshaus and asked for Lord Dunmore.

The Earl had heard from May of her meeting with her lover.

"You know all," he asked, as he took the young man's hand, "and you still wish to marry my child, Mr. Thomas?"

"I know all, and it is still my dearest wish to marry May. My means are not large, Lord Dunmore. I can settle five thousand pounds upon my wife, and if I continue to prosper in my profession I can surround her with every luxury!"

"May will not go to her husband penniless," said the Earl, gravely. "From the day I discovered my misfortune I set to work to save something for my child, in case the truth ever was discovered. I can give May a handsome dowry—I cannot give her my name!"

"I know you look on me as the cause of your disappointment," said Denis, gravely; "but ask yourself, could the child have been happy as Captain Pearson's wife even had we never met? Would he have been her choice?"

The Earl sighed.

"No; yet I cannot help regretting what must follow. In three days' time my nephew will know he is heir-at-law to my estates. Do you think I can be resigned when I know that my own story and my poor wife's will be public property?"

"I think you are too credulous. I don't believe Mrs. Pearson will fulfil her threat. I am sure to be the first to hear of it if she does!"

"How so?"

"I must run over to England on business, and I am sure to see something of Mrs. Glenarvon and her family. I shall only be away about a week. When I return here I shall beg you to give me May!"

"Not at once?"

"At once! I want to be able to protect her from all slander before Mrs. Pearson proclaims that she is 'nobody's daughter.' I want the world to know that she is my wife!"

The first news that met Denis Glenarvon on reaching his Chelsea lodgings was to learn that a woman had called two or three times to see him.

She said her business was of the utmost importance, and her name was Mrs. Pearson. Further particulars she would not vouchsafe.

Just as he expected, she called again the day after his arrival, and, by his orders, was shown into his studio.

She began the interview by saying she had a secret to impart to him worth a large sum of money. What price was he prepared to offer for the information?

"Nothing!"

"You don't understand," persisted the woman. "It would make a rich man of you!"

"I have ample for my wants."

"You'd be 'somebody' then, I can tell you!"

"And I have no desire to be."

She was nonplussed. Denis looked at her coldly, and said,—

"Before you came to offer your secret to me, would it not have been better to resign the pension you are receiving from Lord Dunmore?"

She stared.

"The Earl and I are close friends," went on Mr. Glenarvon, gravely. "I don't suppose there is a secret in his whole life he has not told me. I don't see your right to meddle in our family concerns, but I don't mind telling you I am engaged to his only child!"

Mrs. Pearson sat down. She looked like a creature struck "all of a heap."

"I hope Lord Dunmore may be spared for many a year," went on Denis, fiercely. "At his decease the title and estates will descend to my wife and myself. It would puzzle even you, I fancy, to discover a nearer heir than his daughter and his brother's son?"

Mrs. Pearson felt that fate was against her.

"One thing more," said Denis, slowly. "Lord Dunmore and I both know you are powerless to do us any real harm. It is not likely any slanders a woman like you might invent would be believed; but I am authorised to tell you, that as the Earl shrinks from his story being food for idle gossip, the income you now enjoy will be continued, and will revert to your brother at your death, provided you refrain from talking of our family history!"

Mrs. Pearson glared at him. She was bitterly disappointed at the result of her morning's work.

She would have liked to defy Mr. Glenarvon, but her assured income was a good bit to resign for the indulgence of petty spite; besides, she knew perfectly the sting was taken out of her story. Nothing she could say would really harm Lady May when once the girl was married to her cousin.

Very sulkily, therefore, she condescended to intimate to Mr. Glenarvon that she meant to hold her tongue. She and Jem would go back to America; and she would trouble Lord Dunmore to send the income out to them there, and then she took her departure.

Denis did not pause in England to visit his mother and sisters. He wrote to Lord Dunmore announcing his return to Germany, but a letter from the Earl arrived, saying he should like his daughter to be married in his native land.

The clergyman who had performed her mother's second marriage was still alive. For many reasons it would be well that he should unite his daughter to the lover of her choice.

Denis agreed. He went down to the remote Monmouthshire village spoken of by the Earl, and sought out Mr. Granville. In two minutes he had recalled the whole circumstances to his mind—in half-an-hour he had confided his own secret to him, and the two were firm friends.

"Your sentiments do you honour, Mr. Glenarvon," said the clergyman, kindly. "I shall be delighted to perform your wedding."

"Hush!" said Denis, smiling; "Mr. Thomas, if you please. May is quite capable of sending me to the rightabout if she knew the fraud I am practising upon her."

As "Mr. Thomas" he welcomed May and her father—as Mr. Thomas he escorted them to the Vicarage, where they were to be Mr. Granville's guests until the wedding-day. Only in the licence was he described by his true name. The Vicar, entering heart and soul into his plans, discreetly dropped a piece of blotting-paper over the bridegroom's signature in the register before he invited May for the last time to write her maiden name.

There was a very pleasant little breakfast at the Vicarage; then while May was putting on her travelling attire, her father and husband found themselves *elle-dieu*.

"She is safe now!" breathed Denis. "This morning's ceremony has defeated Mrs. Pearson's malice for ever."

The Earl shook his head.

"She is an honest man's wife, but she is

nobody's daughter! The truth will out yet, Denis. As soon as Thomas Glenarvon's son hears the truth he will assert his rights."

"He will never do so!" returned Denis, gravely. "He loves May too well!"

"Loves May? Why he never saw her!"

"He is her husband! Forgive me, Uncle Gdy; I would not tell you before. I might have lost her if I had. Your child may not be legally Lady May, but she is May Glenarvon as truly as though she had been born so. Some day, not a very distant one I trust, she will be Countess of Dunmore!"

"Denis!"

As he wrung the young man's hand how he blessed him!

"It is all right," said Denis, gladly. "Some people may call me a fortune-hunter, but I think I can bear even that for her dear sake!"

He never had to bear it. No one who saw the young couple together ever doubted that their marriage was one of anything but mutual love.

Whilst they were on their honeymoon Lord Dunmore exerted himself to call on all his old intimates, and make interest with those high up in politics; and by their help he gained the one thing needful to complete his happiness.

The Queen graciously consented that on his death his son-in-law should be Earl of Dunmore, and enjoy all the privileges of the peerage as fully as though he had been born Viscount Glenarvon.

That last point settled, a time of tranquil happiness dawned for the old nobleman. He lived to see Denis famous throughout the land. He lived to nurse May's children—children for whose future he need have no fear—who were born to the name and rank he had once feared their mother must be deprived of.

And May and her husband—they are lovers still.

The world admits that Lord and Lady Dunmore are among its happiest couples; even Mrs. Thomas Glenarvon and her six spinster daughters have been unable to find a flaw in the domestic felicity of the household at The Towers, where Susan reigns supreme, especially in the autumn season, when, leaving children, friends, and gaiety, the married lovers like to cross to the Continent and spend a few happy days at Konigsmaagd, the dreamy German village whose legend gave to Denis undying fame, and which is dearer still, both to him and his wife, because in that quaint spot he first met and loved Lady May.

[THE END.]

## FACTS.

HE:—"I'm going to take away a bottle of salt water as a memento of this watering-place." SHE:—"But don't fill it too full, for fear it should slop over on us when the tide comes in."

"AND so you have obtained a divorce from that vagabond husband of yours?" "Yes, I am glad to say I have." "Didn't you feel quite overpowered when you heard the decision of the judge?" "Not exactly. I felt sort of unmanned, so to speak."

"IT is indeed a heavy responsibility," said a slender youth, referring to matrimony. "Would you be willing to shoulder it?" asked his friend. "Shoulder it?" exclaimed the chap. "Why, my girl weighs at least one hundred and seventy-five pounds. I'd much rather hold her on my lap."

SONS:—"Say, Bobs, what is the world have you got in that little basket? A basket that size loaded with lead wouldn't make an enfeebled old woman tired." BOBS:—"It's something heavier than that." "What is it?" "It is a loaf of bread our new cook made, and my wife got me to carry it to a poor family."

"WHAT are the last teeth that come?" asked a teacher to her class in physiology. "False teeth, mmh," replied a boy who had just waked up on the back seat.

THE PLAIN TRUTH.—"Yes, boys," said the teacher, "honesty is the best policy. It will surely bring its reward; it will give you a clean conscience, and will prove a blessing throughout your whole life. I am glad we have a good example of honesty among your own number. John Smith, stand up." (John Smith rises.) "Now, John, when I was coming to school this morning, I happened to drop a two-shilling-piece out of my pocket, without the slightest knowledge of the fact, and you, like an honest and noble boy, returned it to me. Tell the boys what prompted you to do such an honourable act, when you might have kept it for yourself." "Please, sir, 'cause it was a bad one," replied John.

HIGH SOUNDING PHRASES.—"Too many people are fond of using long words. A gentleman said to his servant Pat: 'I am going to town at ten o'clock, and shall weed out the cucumber bed in the interim.' 'Interim,' thought Pat, 'That's a queer name for a garden, anyhow.' 'Is Mr. Smith at home?' asked a visitor, who came shortly afterward. 'Yis, sor; ye'll find him at work in his interim, there beyant,' announced Pat. Sidney Smith was once looking through the hot-house of a lady who was very proud of her flowers, and used, not very accurately, a profusion of botanical names. 'Madam,' said he 'have you the Septennia psoriasis?' 'No,' said she, 'I had it last winter, and I gave it to the Archbishop of Canterbury; it came out beautifully in the spring.' (Septennia psoriasis is the medical name for the itch.)

## NO DOGS ALLOWED.

The train was just about to leave the station, when the guard observed a small white dog, with a bushy tail and bright black eyes, sitting comely on the seat beside a young lady so handsome that it made his heart beat nineteen to the dozen. But duty is duty, and he remarked in his most deprecatory manner,—

"I'm very sorry, madam, but it's against the rules to have dogs in the passenger carriages."

"Oh, is it?" and she turned two lovely brown eyes at him beseechingly. "What in the world shall I do? I can't throw him away; he's a birthday present from my aunt."

"By no means, miss. We'll put him in the van, and he'll be just as happy as a robin in springtime."

"What, put my nice dog in a van?"

"I'm very sorry, miss, I do assure you; but the rules of this company are as inflexible as the laws of the Medes and them other fellows, you know. He shall have my overcoat to lie on, and he shall have plenty food and water every time he opens his month."

"I think it's very cruel, that I do; and I know somebody will steal it," and she showed a half notion to cry that nearly broke the guard's heart; but he was firm, and sang out to a porter,—

"Here, Andy, take this dog into the van, and tell Dudley to take the best possible care of him."

The young lady pouted, but the man reached over and picked the dog up as tenderly as though it was a two weeks' old baby, but as he did so a strange expression came over his face, and he said hastily to the guard, "Here, you just hold him a minute," and he trotted out at the door and held on to the handle, shaking like a man with the ague.

The guard no sooner had his hands on the dog than he looked around for a hole to fall through.

"Wh-wh-why, that is a stuffed dog!"

"Yes, sir," said the little miss, demurely. "Did you not know that?"

"No, I'm sorry to say that I didn't know that," and he laid the dog down in the owner's lap, thinking he was the most sold man ever seen on that railway.

SAID a young man to a professor of chemistry, at the same time holding up a fungus-looking plant: "Is there any way by which I can positively tell whether this is a mushroom or a toadstool?" "Yes," answered the professor. "Eat it. If it is a mushroom, you'll live; if it's a toadstool you'll die."

"MA, this paper says there are three thousand nine hundred and fifty bands of mercy in this country. What is a band of mercy?" "An association for charitable purposes, child." "Oh, I thought it meant a brass band that didn't practise evenings."

"JOHNNY, it would be a good thing for you to remember in life that we never get anything in this world if we don't ask for it." "Yes we do, pa," answered Johnny, promptly; "I got a licking to-day in school, and you can bet I didn't ask for it."

EXTRACT from a boy's composition:—"The disobedience of parents is often the source of a great deal of uneasiness to their offspring. Men who commit the darkest crimes generally begin by being disobedient to their children."

"VERY cold last night, Mr. Townsend," observed the reporter. "Cold! I should say so! I went home; lit a candle; jumped into bed; tried to blow the candle out; couldn't do it; blaze frozen; had to break it off," replied Mr. Townsend.

DAINTY MASHER.—"Melinda, how did you like my serenade last night?" Melinda: "I didn't like your position." "My position? My attitude, you mean." "No; no, your position. You weren't far enough away for me not to hear you, and you were not close enough for me to scald you."

WOMAN: "If I give you something to eat, will you saw a little wood?" TRAMP: "No, mum, I'm too weak to saw wood. I'm not lazy, jest weak; but I'm willing to do what I can. You give me a good dinner, an' I'll sit out in the cornfield for a scarecrow while I'm eatin' it."

AN absent-minded professor was sitting at his desk writing one evening, when one of his children entered. "What do you want?" "I can't be disturbed now." "I only want to say good-night." "Never mind now; to-morrow morning will do as well."

TOO LITTLE MANNERS.—An eminent English barrister was a lawyer of fine abilities, but his overwhelming egotism led him too frequently to forget the courtesy due to both bench and bar. On one occasion, while pleading in a case in which the question of manorial rights was involved, he said, addressing the court: "My lord, I can illustrate the point in an instant in my own person. I myself have two little manors." "We all know it, sir," calmly interrupted the witty Lord Mansfield, who was sitting as judge. "Proceed."

AN old French peasant woman was going into the village church one evening with a wax taper in each hand, as if to make an offering. "For whom are those candles, my daughter?" asked the parish priest, with an approving smile. "This one, my father, is for St. Michael, the prince of the angels." "Good, my daughter; but for whom is the other?" "The other, my father, is for the Prince of Darkness." "For the Father of Evil?" "My daughter?" echoed the horrified ecclesiastic. "To be sure, my father," answered old Lisette, coolly; "it's just as well to have friends on both sides."

FITNESS OF WOMEN.—The suggestion that on account of "Intellectual and physical fitness," women should be employed as pharmacists, is not favoured by medical journals. One of them states that as women "will talk while doing business," they are unfitted for pharmacy or other work requiring concentration of thought and mental isolation. But it should be borne in mind that women are filling with credit to themselves positions for which, ten years ago, they were presumed to be wholly unfitted. What woman, after all, ever talked more than the average barber?



## SOCIETY.

The forty-fourth birthday of the Prince of Wales was celebrated on November 9th at Sandringham, with the usual festivities, a large number of guests being present, including the Duke of Edinburgh. The chief event was the annual dinner to all the labourers on the estate, which was provided as usual in the large dining room in the Royal Mews. The Royal party enjoyed an excellent day's shooting.

A HANDSOME volume has been presented to Miss Gordon, sister of the late General Gordon, containing an illuminated address sympathising with her in her bereavement, and alluding in a touching manner to the virtues of her brother. The preparation of this memorial, or address of condolence, which has been signed by the Princesses of Great Britain, peeresses of the realm, wives of bishops, and of members of the House of Commons, as representing the women of the United Kingdom, has been under the supervision of several noble ladies who formed a committee.

A MARRIAGE has been arranged between the Infanta Maria Eulalia, sister of King Alfonso of Spain, and the Infante Antonio, son of the Duke of Montpensier.

THE PRINCESS OF WALES and her daughters all rode at the grand stag hunt at Eu, a favourite hunter of the Princess's being sent over from Sandringham for her use.

CAMBRISTHAN and Newmains, Lanarkshire, were very recently the scene of much excitement in consequence of the marriage of Miss Houldsworth with Mr. Ernest Sullivan (Hampshire Regiment, 87th). The youthful bride wore a very elegant dress of white duchesse satin, trimmed with point de gaze Brussels lace. The six bridesmaids wore satin merveilles, with crepon draperies, ruffles of the same, and bodices *en suite*, fichus adorned with pearl embroidery, white plush hats, with feathers and aigrettes; and ornaments in the shape of a heart, entwined with pearls and diamonds, the gift of the bridegroom.

THE Prince of Wales was expected to visit Mr. and Mrs. Villebois at Marham for a few days' shooting about the 23rd ult.

THREE years ago the Duke of Abercorn celebrated his golden wedding at Baron's Court. He was married in 1832 to Lady Louisa Russell, one of the lovely daughters of the sixth Duke of Bedford, and on the 50th anniversary of their wedding day they were surrounded by five sons, five daughters, fifty-six grandchildren, and four great grandchildren.

Among the children recently confirmed by Bishop Titcombe at Carlisle, according to the rites of the English Church, was a daughter of the Prince and Princess Waldeck, a younger sister of the Duchess of Albany.

The death of Madame Cordier, a celebrated beauty of the second Empire, and sister to the Marquise de Gallifet, died a few days ago in Paris from the too frequent use of morphine.

THE Princess Marie, Prince Waldemar's bride, is particularly fond of animals. She has a small bull terrier to whom she is devotedly attached, and this favourite pet was taken with the Princess on her honeymoon. For the occasion a special wedding collar of crocodile skin mounted in silver was prepared for him.

THE wedding of the Right Hon. the Earl of Mayo, with Miss Geraldine Ponsonby, eldest daughter of the Hon. Gerald and Lady Maria Ponsonby, on Nov. 3rd, at St. Mark's, North Audley-street, was a very stylish affair. The bride's dress was of the richest white Ottoman satin, brocaded with a large design of tulips and lilies, and the petticoat of white Irish poplin was tastefully draped with flounces of old Brussels point lace. She wore a wreath of orange-blossom and jessamine, over which was thrown a beautiful Brussels point lace veil. Her only ornament was a pearl necklace.

## STATISTICS.

THE "INVENTIONS" EXHIBITION.—The Inventions Exhibition, which opened on the 4th May, and has therefore been open 163 days, was on November 9th finally closed. Although enjoying a longer lease of life than any of our great International Exhibitions, the number of visitors to the "Inventions" falls considerably short of that attracted by its predecessor. The "Fisheries" Exhibition in 1883 was visited by 2,703,051 persons; the "Healtheries" in 1884 attracted no fewer than 4,167,000; while this year's Exhibition has had to be content with 3,760,581, making a daily average of 23,071. The weather has, with few exceptions, been against the enjoyment of the grounds. Spring there was none; the summer was late and short; and the entire season has been wet and damp. On Whit-Monday the buildings were visited by 73,364 persons, while the biggest week of the season showed a total of 211,333 visitors. On the closing day the exhibition was throughout the afternoon well attended, and despite the Scotch mist which fell incessantly during the evening, there was a large crowd in the grounds, the total number of visitors for the day being 27,273.

## GEMS.

HE that swears tells us that his bare word is not to be credited.

THE perfection of conversation is not to play a regular sonata, but, like the Æolian harp, to await the inspiration of the passing breeze.

THE experiences of each year of our lives ought to enable us to spend every succeeding one better than the last.

OLD friends are best. King James used to call for his old shoes; they were the easiest for his feet.

GENTLENESS is a sort of mild atmosphere, and it enters into a child's soul like the sunbeam into the rosebud, slowly but surely expanding it into beauty and vigour.

THOUGHT and sympathy are often more valuable than anything money can procure. Both need continual circulation to keep them wholesome and strong.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

To keep milk sweet, put a little horseradish into it, and it will remain so for several days, while other milk will become sour.

CLEANING SOILED CARPETS.—Two gallons of water, ½ lb. of soft soap dissolved in it, to which add 4 oz. of liquid ammonia; rub this mixture on with a dannel, then dry it with a coarse cloth.

CHRISTMAS CHEESECAKES.—One pint of curd, quarter pint of rich cream, juice and peel of one lemon; a salt-spoonful of powdered cassia, a wineglass of cognac, sugar *a discretion*, and ½ lb. of nicely-flavoured mince-meat made without meat, 1 oz. liquid fresh butter. Make the requisite quantity of curd with prepared rennet, on the bottles containing which are given full directions for the making of curd. Add the cream, the eggs well beaten and strained, the strained juice and grated peel of the lemon, the cassia, mince-meat, cognac, and, last of all, the sugar, as the quantity required will depend a little on the sweetness of the mince-meat. Line your pattypans with puff crust; fill them three-parts full with the cheesecake mixture, and bake in a moderate oven, a delicate brown. Directly your cheesecakes are taken from the oven, sprinkle them with finely-powdered sugar; or, if to be eaten cold, as soon as they are cool enough cover them with white sugar grains, which are made by crushing loaf sugar roughly to about the size of grains of sage.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

Does that man take a rational course to preserve himself who refuses the endurance of those lesser troubles to secure himself from a condition inconceivably more miserable?

GOOD MANNERS.—Good manners are not learned from arbitrary teaching so much as acquired from habit. They grow upon us by use. We must be courteous, agreeable, civil, kind, gentlemanly and womanly at home, and then it will soon become a kind of second nature to be so everywhere. A coarse, rough manner at home begets a habit of roughness which we cannot lay off, if we try, when we go among strangers. The most agreeable people we have ever known in company are those that are perfectly agreeable at home. Home is the school for all the best things, especially for good manners.

PAINTING.—A new idea for ladies fond of painting is the following: A common Japanese paper hand-screen is prepared with a groundwork of yellow, dark green or other suitable colour, (this is best painted in oil colours), on this is painted a spray of apple blossoms or other flowers, and a large bow of ribbon, the colour of the groundwork or the flowers, is attached to the handle. These hand-screens are a convenient size for painting, and when tastefully executed look well on the wall of a room, just resting on a picture frame. Pretty work for painters, also, is to paint on black gauze, with Bessemer's gold paint, the front and trimming for an evening dress. Birds lightly resting on sprays of flowers, and butterflies, make an effective decoration for a black satin dress; fans also look lovely painted in this manner, and it is by no means a difficult form of painting, as a few touches produce a wonderful effect.

SMALL CIVILITIES.—Optional civilities, such as saying to one's inferior, "Do not stand without your hat," to one's equal, "Do not rise, I beg of you," "Do not come out in the rain to put me in my carriage," naturally occur to the kind-hearted, but they may be cultivated. It used to be enumerated among the uses of foreign travel, that a man went away a bear and came home a gentleman. It is not natural to the Anglo-Saxon race to be over-polite. A husband in France moves out an easy-chair for his wife, and sets a foot-stool for every lady. He hands her the morning paper, he brings a shawl if there is danger of a draught, he kisses her hand when he comes in, and tries to make himself agreeable to her in the matter of these little optional civilities. It has the most charming effect upon all domestic life, and we find a curious allusion to the politeness observed by French sons towards their mothers and fathers in one of Molière's comedies, where a prodigal son observes to his father, who comes to denounce him, "Pray, sir, take a chair; you could stolid me so much more at your ease if you were seated."

PUBLIC BATHS.—The public baths of Rome were among its most splendid works. Under the emperors, the Romans were a cleanly people. It is noticeable that in all capitals of the world to-day there is a disposition to imitate the Romans. Public baths are recognised as being as essential as common schools. Public health can be preserved in no better way than in providing means for keeping the mass of the population clean. We are rediscovering also a fact well-known to the Romans, that hot air and vapour baths have a therapeutic value. They cure diseases of various kinds. The public baths of Vienna almost vie with some of the Roman baths, and are the finest in the world. The building is situated in the heart of the city, is five hundred and seventy feet in length and one hundred and seventy-six in width, and has accommodations for one thousand five hundred persons at one time.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**R. V. W.**—The great Lord Nelson was a well-educated man, and left a considerable body of correspondence.

**SUNSHINE**—Colour of hair as pretty as your new dress, a very pretty light brown. Handwriting neat and ladylike.

**H. J.**—Bleeding at the nose: A good remedy is a cold application to the head, face, and back of neck, and, if continued, mustard and water to the feet.

**KATE PUNA**.—1. The hair is golden auburn. 2. Writing would be good enough for the purpose named, with practice. 3. Certainly not too old to learn. We have no recollection of having received your previous letter.

**T. A. K.**—The proper way to make starch is to mix it with cold water until it becomes of the consistency of paste; then pour upon it boiling water, about a pint to an ounce of starch; the best vessels to make it in are earthenware pipkins.

**H. K.**—Chocolate was first introduced into Europe from Mexico and the Brazil, about A.D. 1520. It is the flour or paste of the cocoa berry, and makes a wholesome beverage and a delicate confection. It was first sold in coffee-houses in 1650.

**F. M.**—The fruit, the cherry, derives its name from Cerasus, a city of Pontus. It was introduced into England by the Romans, but became extinct during the Saxon period. It was reintroduced by the gardener of Henry VIII., who brought it from Flanders.

**J. N.**—There is no remedy for a red face but quinine and a proper attention to your diet; but if the rubicund face do not arise from the habits to which you allude, why attempt to challenge nature? You know the leopard cannot change its spots, nor the negro his skin.

**A. D.**—Necropolis literally means the city of the dead, and was the name given to a suburb of Alexandria, in Egypt, containing temples, gardens, and mausoleums; hence it has been applied to some of the cemeteries in the vicinity of our large cities.

**G. L. A.**—Your friend was quite right in his assertion. A contented mind will give all that an alchemist ascribes to the philosopher's stone; for if it cannot remove the disquietudes arising from the mind, body, or fortune, it gives relief under them.

**M.**—The safest course would be to discontinue smoking; if it causes much expectation it is undoubtedly bad, as it is injurious to the gastric juices; on the contrary, to swallow the saliva is to incontinently poison yourself, for the nicotine is of a deadly nature.

**O. C. A.**—It is a popular belief that washing children daily in cold water makes them strong; nevertheless, it is a great mistake. The feeble circulation of some requires the aid of warm water and warm clothing. John Hunter, the great surgeon, said, "Give children plenty of milk, sleep, and flannel."

**EMMER**—Eggs are the most simple of things to dress, and yet the least attended to. The shepherds of Egypt had a singular manner of cooking them without the aid of fire. They placed them in a sling, which they turned so rapidly that the friction of the air heated them to the exact point required for use.

**W. L. B.**—1. If you are really suffering from neuralgia, apply at once to a medical man, for although the prescription you name is excellent, it may not be adapted to every constitution, hence, having tried it ineffectually, you should seek advice. 2. The prescription may have been badly made up in both instances.

**T. C. D.**—Dispensaries to supply the poor with medical advice and medicine were first started in London with the Royal General Dispensary, which was established in St. Bartholomew's-close, 1770, since when they have arisen in every part of the metropolis, and have proved one of the greatest boons of modern civilisation.

**B. T.**—1. You and your inamorata, having reached the age of twenty-one, can, of course, marry without the consent of your respective friends. 2. Common licences may be obtained at Doctors' Commons, at a cost of £3 12s. 6d. You must, however, be married in the church of the parish in which one of you has resided the specified time.

**G. D. E.**—Nankin is a species of cotton cloth, usually of a yellow colour, imported from China; it takes its name from the city of Nankin, and derives its colour from the peculiar hue of the cotton from which it is made, and not from the use of any dye. A white material of similar texture, called white nankin, is also imported from China.

**M. R.**—The halls of learning are not always the temples of wisdom; sending a boy to school will not necessarily make him wise. Many learned men have been wicked and weak, and many illiterate men have been good and wise. The possession of vast and varied information does not necessarily make a man wiser than the uncultivated peasant, nor than—

The poor Indian, whose untutored mind

Sees God in clouds, and hears Him in the wind.

Yet learning men's not be depreciated, for though to some education has proved a curse, to many others it has been a blessing. There is truth in the old lines—

Learning is better than house or lands;

For when house and lands are gone and spent

Then learning is most excellent.

**LAURA**.—The best remedy for the heartburn is the following effervescent drink:—Take occasionally the juice of an orange, with loaf sugar to flavour, and in proportion to the acidity of the orange a little bicarbonate of soda; mix the orange juice, sugar, and water together in a tumbler; then add the soda; stir and drink while effervescing.

**L. D. B.**—We would advise you to study stenography. If you have the energy and patience to work hard enough to master it in a reasonable time, for even if you do not become a regular reporter, the accomplishment will make it easier for you to obtain good mercantile positions. There is usually a demand for good stenographers and type-writers.

**TOM TRYALL**.—You would have little or no chance of making the acquaintance of any one fit to become your wife by inserting an advertisement in the paper. The best way to make respectable acquaintances among the other sex is to win the friendship and respect of some of your fellow-workmen, and to get them to introduce you to their families and friends.

**L. F. R.**—Under the circumstances, as stated in your letter, we cannot recommend you any specific. Take our advice, consult a medical man, and if you really value your health keep rigorously to the regimen he prescribes. At your age, adhering to the ordinary laws of health, you ought to effect a cure in a very short time.

**LILY**.—So-called invisible writing may be executed with many materials. If you write with milk, or the juice of an onion, the characters will only appear when the paper is held to the fire. So words written either with tincture of galls or solution of white copperas will only appear on being washed with the other of these fluids.

## TO THE OLD YEAR.

Farewell to thee, thou departing old year:  
Like our cherished hopes of happiness here,  
Thou art slow, solemnly passing away;  
We may not recall thee, or bid thee to stay;

Thy days and weeks and months that have passed,  
And thy numbered hours, have sped on so fast  
That thy half-forgotten remembrances seem  
Like the waking thoughts of a passing dream.

Time has rolled on in its still rapid flight,  
Each returning day succeeded by night;  
Cold winter and spring with its buds and its flowers,  
Glad summer, and autumn with bright-hued bowers,

With shadow and sunshine, have all passed by;  
'Neath the gentle light of the same soft sky,  
Some loved ones have been welcomed home,  
And many have parted away to roam;

Yet our smiles have been far more than our tears,  
And our hopes and our joys outnumbered our fears,  
Then once more farewell, thou dying old year:  
We do not ask for thy longer reign here.

The frosts of winter have whitened thy brow,  
And from thy cold looks hang the icicles low,  
With sad but kind thoughts we bid thee adieu,  
While we wait with hopes to welcome the new.

W. B.

**T. W.**—It is not possible for physicians, however skilful they may be, to cure every case of disease with which mortals are afflicted. There are very competent physicians in your city, but it is possible that none of them could cure you. However, while there is life there is hope, and it would do no harm for you to try to find a doctor who could treat your case successfully.

**M. F.**—Under the circumstances which you describe, the bankrupt could not be legally convicted of fraud. As you state the case, the parties who sold him the goods acted wholly on their own suppositions, and did not sell on him for any statement of his financial condition. Hence there would be no legal basis for an action against him for fraud.

**O. W. G.**—Notwithstanding your husband deserted you so many years since, and that, too, only three months after your marriage to him, you certainly cannot legally marry another man without proof of your husband's death. Your case is a sad one, but why not at once consult a solicitor, who may put you in the way of obtaining a divorce?

**N. D. B.**—Cantharides oil would in all probability suit your purpose, its effect being to encourage the growth and prevent the falling off of the hair. In your case, however, an application to a medical man, who would give you a mixture, would be the better plan. We cannot recommend the specific you mention. Hand-writing neat and ladylike.

**CONNY B.**—Your teacher is quite correct; water will boil at a lower temperature on the top of a mountain than when on a level with the sea, because the air becomes more rarified; consequently it is easier to cause the agitation of the water called boiling, which is, in fact, quite independent of heat. This may be ascertained by putting cold water under an air-pump and exhausting the air, and it will boil even while turning into ice. The monks of the "Great St. Bernard Pass" have had proof of this when trying to boil meat, the water boiling away before it becomes sufficiently heated; for this reason they cannot make good tea or coffee.

**V. N.**—The King of Rome, better known as the Duke de Reichstadt, was the son of Napoleon the Great, by an Austrian princess, and was born in 1811, and in the current history of France is styled Napoleon II.

**L. N.**—The feelings of the heart, as well as the thoughts of the mind, give to the countenance all its perfections. A frequent recurrence of these feelings and thoughts will at last vividly impress that mark, which a single and fleeting instance would naturally cause; even to the eyes the heart imparts its peculiar sensibilities, sorrow by contraction, and joy by expansion.

**W. R. W.**—We should not be discontented with our lot; the sentences of toil and the promise of glory issued from the same throne; even our troubles may help to form the materials for enjoyment. The obstacle to knowledge, the struggles of the heart, all tend to increase the strength of the mind. It is but sowing in our nature now seed that shall flourish in immortality.

**W. L.**—You are correct. Bad news will weaken the action of the heart, destroy the appetite, injure the digestion, and partially suspend all the functions of the system; an emotion of shame will flush the face, fear will blanch it, joy illuminate it. Chilo and Sappho died from joy at the Grecian games; many able speakers have died in the midst of an impassioned burst of eloquence, or when the emotion that produced it suddenly subsided.

**G. W. R.**—A quick and accurate ear for sounds is of course necessary to a short-hand reporter, but this does not imply any knowledge of music or any capacity for appreciating harmony or melody, any more than great skill in discriminating shades of colour implies good taste in using them. You can get a number of text-books founded on the system introduced by Pitman, any one of which can be used with advantage, without any help, except that of some patient friend to dictate to you.

**A. C. D.**—A straightforward course would be the best one. Try to make your peace with the young lady's mother by treating her courteously whenever you meet her. Your nephew's stories as to what the girls say about you may be inventions of his own. Perhaps he does not want you to get married, as that might interfere with his expectations as to your property. If the girl really has a liking for you, the probabilities are that she will help you to overcome all the prejudices which the mother has against you.

**LOUIS**—We think as badly as you possibly can of any one who tries to make trouble between a husband and wife; but by simply observing the rule of sharing all your amusements with your wife, and keeping no secrets from her, you can afford to ignore the mischief-maker. In future, take care that your wife forms one of all your card parties; or, if she disapproves of that form of amusement, find an amusement in which she can take part.

**J. J. B.**—Our judgment is that the man who interests you so much has no idea of proposing. He is clearly not a shy youth, and no man such as you describe would persist so long in his attentions to a girl of nineteen without speaking of marriage, if he really loved her. You should not allow him to occupy your mind; he has a great advantage over you, because he lives in a distant city and cares little about what your friends may think of him, whereas their good opinion is everything to you. He is a flirt, and if you let him know how much you cared for him he would probably relax his attentions very quickly.

**STUDENT**.—The quotation occurs in the latter part of the eleventh book of "Paradise Lost," where the archangel Michael is presented as telling Adam about the pains of death, when the latter asks:

"But is there yet no other way, besides  
These painful passages, how we may come  
To death?"

"There is," said Michael: "If thou well observe  
The rule of 'Not too much,' by temperance taught,  
In what thou eat'st and drink'st; seeking from  
thence

Due nourishment, not gluttonous delight;  
Till many years over thy head return,  
So may'st thou live, till, like ripe fruit, thou drop  
Into thy mother's lap; or be with ease  
Gathered, not harshly plucked, for death mature.  
This is old age."

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# LONDON READER

## CHRISTMAS NUMBER

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[PRICE TWOPENCE.]

### LITTLE WONDER-EYES.

How the fire-gleams glance through the quaint old room!  
How the children dance in the broken gloom!  
The whole long year is a holl'ay  
To those who forever can laugh and play;  
When the heart and the purse are filled,  
And thrown  
Wide open by parents who love their own.

But, wonder-eyed, in from the driving snow,  
A little one looks on the holiday glow,  
Drawing her thin shawl over her form,  
A-shivering still in the wintry storm.  
And marvels that Christmas only comes  
To the rich and the proud in their pleasant homes.

Happy ones! in your frolic and play,  
Whose whole year through is a holiday,  
Can ye not see those wonder-eyes,  
With their startled delight and pleased surprise?

Have ye neither bon-bon nor toy to spare  
For the giftless out in the winter there?

Her home has no glistening Christmas-tree,  
No frolic, nor joyance, nor jollity;  
Bleak poverty hovers the cold hearth o'er,  
And ever a gaunt wolf snarls at the door;  
Even love is a duty, and life always  
Is a heavy task and a long work-day.

Nay; gaze no longer in pleased surprise  
Through the broken gloom, little Wonder-Eyes!  
But seek not, disheartened, your house or den;  
For no richer was He of the manger when  
He brightened the world with a Christmas glow,  
Eighteen hundred years ago.

D. N.

## In the Bright Yuletide.

### CHAPTER I.

I SUPPOSE in all the fair North Country there was no family more honoured and respected than the Carews of FitzCarew. Rumour asserted they came over with the Conqueror, and that one of their ancestors fought at Hastings. Rumour may have been mistaken in some of these details, but the fact remained; the name was known and revered through the breadth and length of Blankshire, and to be a Carew of FitzCarew was considered a higher honour than an earldom.

Alas! alas! trouble, which comes to so many, did not except this proud old house. A time of ill-luck began for the Carews. The reigning Squire, a boon companion of George IV., mortgaged his fair acres up to the hilt, and thinned the timber, which had never before listened to the woodman's axe; his son was a gambler, who brought further embarrassments on the old estate. And so it went on, one long series of misfortunes, until, at the beginning of the present decade, the grandeur of the old family had fallen so thoroughly that most of their lands had fallen into other hands, and the Squire had much ado to keep up an establishment worthy not his rank or position, but a gentleman.

Everything was scarce at FitzCarew, not only money, but furniture, dresses, and servants. One single male retainer now moved where ten or twelve had been wont to serve; a very few rooms sufficed for use, and the young daughter of the house, the very last of the FitzCarews, boasted no lady's maid, but herself arranged her glossy tresses and attended to the toilet which, in spite of her father's reverses, always had an air of grace and fashion.

Hubert Carew was not a popular man. He had offended Blankshire on its most sensitive points. He did not hunt, though his ancestors had been masters of the foxhounds for centuries; he neither shot nor fished, both of them sports dear to every real Blankshire heart; and, crowning offence of all, he did not marry in his own county, where there were plenty of well-to-do damsels who, in spite of his fallen fortunes, would gladly have been mistress of FitzCarew, but chose to wed a foreigner—anyone born out of Blankshire, in local significance.

The smile of Heaven was not on this union, people said. Mrs. Carew was penniless, and her husband's circumstances were such that a wealthy wife would have been a godsend to him. No one knew much about her, save that she came from Devonshire. Mr. Carew had taken her abroad directly after the wedding, and nothing more was heard of them till just one year after, unexpected and unwelcome, there drove up a close carriage to FitzCarew, from which descended a decent motherly woman, evidently a nurse, with a long-robed baby in her arms, and Hubert Carew himself, a broad black band upon his hat.

That was all. The baby's life had cost her mother's, and Audrey

Carew lay sleeping in a foreign grave. The Master (as he was called in north-country fashion) never mentioned his loss, never sought sympathy or consolation; he settled down among his own people, and devoted himself to his little daughter.

For eighteen years he lived thus, and each found him poorer and more embarrassed. He did not dissipate money as his father and grandfather had done; he seemed to spend next to nothing, and yet his affairs got more and more hopelessly into confusion, till, on Joan's eighteenth birthday, ruin was very near.

The daughter of the Carews was a beautiful, high-bred damsel, with dark lustrous eyes, a face with bright southern colouring, and the thickest and silkiest of black hair. She was a Carew, every inch of her, the villagers said, and her father secretly regretted she bore no resemblance to her sweet, dead mother.

Not that he loved her less; it would have been impossible for any father to have cared more for his daughter than Hubert Carew cared for Joan. For her sake he bore his bitter burden, more bitter and heart-breaking than his neighbours ever guessed; for her sake he prayed for life, even when life had lost all its brightness.

Miss Carew had a liberal education; Miss Carew was never denied anything she desired. Whoever else went short, whatever else was done without, Joan had all she desired; and so, by degrees, the girl lost all belief in their difficulties. She knew, in a vague sort of way, they were not rich, that they could not keep up a state befitting their rank, but that a day might come when FitzCarew itself should belong to them no longer, when they were cast forth, lonely wanderers, into the wide world. She had no idea; she knew her father was often troubled and anxious, but she never guessed it was for her sake, that, dearly as he loved her, he would have seen her married thankfully just that he might be sure she had a protector when he was taken from her.

It was winter time, December was more than half-way through. The Master (we will use the Blankshire title for Hubert Carew) sat at breakfast with his child, the post had just come in, and he was reading his letters with a grave, thoughtful face.

"Papa, what time shall we go to Lady Aylmer's?" asked Joan, looking up from the omelette she was eating with such dainty grace.

Last year Miss Carew had "come out," and now she went to every party in Blankshire. True, the Master did not return his neighbours' festivities; that mattered nothing. His handsome, scholarly face and his child's beauty were welcome everywhere; the prestige of their race hung over the last members of the grand old family.

"I don't think I can go, Joan."

"Not go! Why, it was settled last week!"

Lady Aylmer was a new comer in Blankshire, and she paid great court to the Carews. In common with the rest of the county, she ignored the total ruin that was impending. She knew, as did most people, that the Master was in difficulties; but, then, she knew he had been so for years and years, so that she looked on it as Joan did, as a chronic disorder that might be inconvenient, but was by no means alarming.

"Yes," said Hubert, slowly; "I know, birdie; but I have letters here that will keep me at home."

"Let me stay, too!" pleaded Joan.

"Nonsense! little one; go and be happy."

"I don't think I shall be happy without you. Aylmer Court is not the liveliest place in the world."

"I thought you liked Lady Aylmer?"

Joan looked steadily into the fire.

"I like her when I am with her; but——"

"But what, Joan?"

"I don't think she is sincere."

The Master had doubted that before now himself.

"I don't like the way she treats Miss Chesney," went on Joan, dreamily. "She behaves just as though she were a servant; and Miss Chesney can't help being poor."

"We would all help it if we could, I fancy."

Joan drew up her head.

"What do you mean, papa? We are not poor like that. We may not be rich, like Lady Aylmer; but we can't compare ourselves to Miss Chesney. Why, she has only forty pounds a-year, which Lady Aylmer pays her!"

The Master wondered, hopelessly, whether he could secure even such a pittance as that for his darling when he was dead. An awful fear came to him of Joan spending her bright youth in the servitude of some crotchety person like Lady Aylmer; but he pushed the picture resolutely aside.

"The child is sure to marry," he told himself.

"Won't you come, really, papa?" asked Joan, returning to the charge.

"Not to-day, dear. To-morrow or Thursday I hope to reach the Court."

"But what shall I tell Lady Aylmer?"

"Say that someone is coming to see me on business. Make my regrets to her and Sir John."

"I hate people coming to see you on business," pouted Joan.

"They make you so dull."

The Master sighed.

"I will promise to get cheerful before I present myself at the Court."

Evening had come, the gloom of night crept over FitzCarew. Its fair young mistress had departed, carrying with her much of the brightness of the grim old house. Hubert Carew was always a melancholy man, but certainly a double portion of care was always on his brow whenever fate separated him from his only child.

Dinner was at six to-night, and it was laid for two by the Master's orders; but instead of the bright, winsome face of Joan there sat at the end of the table a tall, thoughtful-looking man, whose eye was as keen, whose mind as clear, as though he had not long ago entered his sixth decade.

It was Marston St. John, nominal head of an old-established firm of solicitors, but who really had almost retired from public life, and only left his little paradise in Kent when the affairs of an old and valued client seemed to need his personal attention.

Such a client was Hubert Carew. Ever since Marston St. John's grandfather founded the firm they had managed the affairs of the Carews, and in justice to them we must observe that had that reckless family only followed their advice things would have gone very differently.

The two men sat opposite each other. They presented a striking contrast—the one successful beyond his dreams, prosperous, wealthy, the head of a family who bid fair to follow in his steps. With no trouble in life, save a slight tendency to the gout, his years sat lightly on the lawyer's brow; and a casual observer, in spite of the twenty years between them, might well have supposed him to be the younger of the two.

There was very little conversation during dinner, and that of the most trivial nature, but as soon as the cloth was removed Hubert Carew gave up his attempts at self-command; he buried his face in his hands and fairly groaned.

"It is quite true, I suppose?" he cried, desperately. "Can you see no way of escape?"

The lawyer looked into the fire, not to deliberate; he knew his answer too well for that, only to gain time.

"I am afraid not."

"Think of the centuries FitzCarew has been in the family. It will kill me to leave the old place, not that I wish to live. Heaven knows I have suffered too much for that. If Joan were but married I would go, only too gladly, to join her mother."

Mr. St. John sighed.

"I have feared this step for years; why Mr. Ford has not foreclosed before I can't imagine."

"He has been paid his interest regularly."

"Yes, but it is low interest for such a sum! Few men could afford to keep a hundred thousand pounds locked up all these years."

"He is a rich man."

"Enormously! I suppose he is one of the largest millowners in Yorkshire."

"A millowner Lord of FitzCarew! It is enough to make the Carews rise from their graves."

"Hardly that," corrected the lawyer, gently. "You know Sir John Aylmer, who is nothing in the world but a millowner's son!"

"And when does the man want possession?"

"He is in no unseemly haste; he offers to pay off the other creditors, and leave you a free man."

"I shall never be that."

There was such an utter despair in his voice, such blank, hopeless misery in his face, that St. John was touched.

"Mr. Carew," he said, with as much deference as though the ruined man had been a millionaire, "am I right in thinking it is not only this money trouble that distresses you?"

A little silence, then simply,—

"I am going to trust you with my miserable story," said Hubert, after a pause. "Shut the door, St. John, and turn down the lamp. I couldn't tell what I have to say in a bright light like this."

St. John coolly turned the key in the lock, and lowered the moderator lamp to the faintest glimmer. All this he did in perfect silence; then he came back to his seat opposite the Master, and waited for him to speak.

"Do you remember Joan's mother?"

Not "Miss Carew," not "my wife"—he spoke of his lost love only as "Joan's mother!"

"Perfectly."

"The sweetest, gentlest creature Heaven ever made, and she was mine! She loved me as well as though I had given her the mines of Golconda."

"She was all that," admitted St. John. "She was one of the sweetest women I ever met; but do you think she would approve of

your life-long grief? Do you think it would please her to see the aimless, useless existence you have led ever since?"

"You hit hard, St. John, but I deserve it."

"If I speak too freely forgive me; but—"

"But you don't know all. You saw Audrey; you know how I loved her, and you believe me mourning for her loss. I tell you I was never more thankful than when I closed my darling's eyes!"

St. John's first impression was that the Master must be mad, but there was nothing of insanity in Hubert's clear, dark eyes.

"I killed her!" went on the wretched man, brokenly. "I, who loved her better than life itself, planted the dagger in her heart which slew her!"

"You must be dreaming!"

"I wish I were. I can remember the whole scene as if it were but yesterday. We were abroad, returning slowly homewards, that the hair we so eagerly expected might be born in England. We were in Paris, expecting to cross in a day or two, when a message was brought that a lady wished to see me alone on urgent business. She sent a card inscribed with the name of my deceased wife."

Marston St. John started.

"Ah, you never heard of that madness. It happened when I was at college, and she ten years my senior. I found her out for what she was in six months. We separated; I giving her half the allowance I received from my father. I don't suppose half-a-dozen people knew of my mistake. Long before I met Audrey the news came that I was free. Before I married my darling I had grown to look on that first wretched entanglement as an ugly dream."

Marston St. John listened with rapt attention. In his eagerness he drew his chair a trifle nearer to his client's. He noticed then that Hubert Carew's face was ashen white, and he trembled for the results of the interview upon his nervous, sensitive frame.

"The card was brought you with her name—do you mean the name that you had given her?"

"Just that—'Kate Carew.' I thought at first some of her relations had come to beg money of me, and brought the card as their introduction. The fearful truth never dawned upon me."

"And you went downstairs?"

"I did. We had a very pretty *salon*, divided in the middle by curtains of thick silk, which were usually drawn. I only mention this to explain the rest. I came down and entered the room abruptly; then every drop of blood in my veins seemed turned to ice. It was the woman whom the law called my wife."

"And you are certain? Sure it was no imposture?"

"I was too certain. She had a bold, daring face, handsome after a certain style; but there was one peculiarity about it no one could imitate. Her hair was blue-black, but in the front there was one long white tress. As my eye fell on the white lock hope died at my heart."

"It was really she?"

"It was. Mean, petty, vindictive revenge had made her spread abroad the report of her death, trusting to deceive me. She had been seeking us for months. She threw it in my teeth that Audrey was—(I cannot put it into words)—that the child we were hoping for could be no Carew."

"And what did you do?"

"I was beside myself. I tried threats, persuasions; I offered money. She was deaf to all. The utmost I could prevail was that she promised to keep the secret until the next day, when I was to call on her."

He paused, as though to take breath, drained a glass of water that stood near him, and then went on,—

"She went. I threw aside the curtain, meaning to go into the other room, and breathe the air that had not been polluted with her presence, but as I entered it I saw what almost broke my heart. Audrey was lying unconscious on the floor. One look at her face and I knew she had heard what I would have died to keep from her. It seemed to me then to matter little whether my secret was kept or not since it had reached the creature I best loved."

St. John took his hand and pressed it warmly. There were tears in the lawyer's eyes. He had listened to many strange stories, heard many mysterious confidences before, but never one which interested or saddened him more than this.

"There is little more to say," went on Hubert, wearily. "When morning dawned my Audrey had left me, and I had a little nameless child. People who knew how I had worshipped Audrey marvelled to see my dry eyes, my calm self-concern, and they little knew the burden heavy at my heart."

"And the other?"

"Who?"

"The woman the law would call Mrs. Carew."

Carew shuddered.

"I think even she felt guilty when she heard of her work. At that moment it seemed to me nothing mattered. I dared her to do her worst. Then she asked me if I would like Audrey's child to be branded as— I need not give you the details. We arranged that she was to keep the secret while I supplied her with money. She would not name any stated sum, so that I was at her mercy. In all these years I have never dared to refuse her demands, though I knew they were bringing me to ruin."

"But she must have spent thousands."

"Aye, and tens of thousands. Money flies fast when it can be had



for the asking, and goes to supply the wants of a gamestess and a drunkard."

"Has she fallen as low as that?"

"She has fallen as low as it is possible, only I have no redress; my hands are tied."

"You must have suffered."

"Suffered! Aye, my days have been one long anguish; my life one living agony."

"It has told on you."

"Aye, I am full twenty years younger than you, and yet I look your senior. I never could have borne it but for Joan."

"And she knows nothing?"

"Nothing in the world. I don't think she has any idea even how great are my difficulties. I did just give her a hint to-day that it would be a relief to me when I saw her safe in a good man's keeping."

"A relief?"

"Unspeakable."

"But everything *must* be revealed then."

"Any man who woos Joan must do so for herself alone, since everyone knows she is penniless; anyone who loved her would not forsake her for the cruel misfortune which is in no part her fault."

It was the irony of fate that a few days afterwards Hubert Carew's wife died, and was verified this time beyond a doubt.

## CHAPTER II.

MR. FORD and the late Sir John Aylmer had once been close friends; both were rich men, both had made their wealth, but yet there was a great difference between them. Aylmer began life as a mill-hand at a few shillings a-week; James Ford was the son of a manager, received an excellent education, and succeeded to his father's post. He never knew the drudgery, the rough companions, the coarse associations, which perforce were Aylmer's lot.

James Aylmer got on, overtook his friend in the race for wealth, and for a time seemed to surpass him; seemed, that is, because Aylmer's one aim was to appear rich, and make people pay court to him for his wealth, while Mr. Ford hated all display and ostentation. One stuck to the old business, the other sold his share as soon as it would realise his expectations; one set up for a fine gentleman, went into Parliament, and tried to force himself into the best society; the other went on in his native place, respected and esteemed by those who knew him as a pleasant neighbour and scholarly man, and yet never guessed the almost fabulous wealth the mill brought him year by year.

His wife died young, so there was no feminine influence to induce him to make a dash, such as had been brought to bear on Sir John Aylmer. He never replaced her, but devoted himself heart and soul to her two children, loving them as tenderly, bringing them up as carefully as though they had been his own instead—as was the case—of forming the only dower Rosalie Fairfax brought him when he married her a penniless widow years before our story.

"Ken, I have an invitation for you."

The two were sitting at breakfast on the very December morning on which Joan Carew started to visit Lady Aylmer.

Aline, a pretty, fairy-like girl of seventeen, who was pouring out the coffee, looked up all expectation; Kenneth, eight or nine years her senior, smiled back an inquiry on his stepfather.

Not that the word stepfather was ever known in that house. Aline had come there a baby in arms, and remembered no other home; Kenneth was old enough to know that his mother had owed all her happiness to her second husband, and that, if his own father's family were allied to the peerage, they yet had shown scant kindness to the widow and orphans.

"Do you remember Lady Aylmer?"

Ken shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sure I thought she had forgotten our existence by this time. I remember her perfectly; a fidgety little lady, who was always scolding you for not living up to your position."

Mr. Ford smiled.

"I fancy she lives a little too much up to hers. Her husband left a fine property, but her son knows no more how to manage it than a baby; besides, he's very wild. She seems anxious that he should marry."

"Pleasant for his wife."

"Well, he'd settle down then."

"Is that why you're so anxious to provide me with a better-half?" inquired Ken Fairfax, quietly. "Has it occurred to you that I am dreadfully wild, dad?"

"It has occurred to me," said Mr. Ford, smiling again, "that if my wish is ever to be gratified—"

"Which it never will be," put in a mischievous voice in an audible whisper.

"You ought to see more of the world," continued Mr. Ford, rather as if he felt he had made a suggestion which would be hopelessly crushed.

"And so you have persuaded her ladyship to invite me to Aylmer Court?" said his son, good-temperedly. "Talk about manœuvring mothers, sir; none of them ever came up to you in iniquity."

"But you will go, Ken?" urged his father, persuasively.

"I'd much rather not."

"I really wish you would. I don't like Lady Aylmer, but I can't forget that her husband and I were close friends."

Ken shrugged his shoulders.

"I wonder her ladyship condescends to remember our existence. I thought she hated trade and all connected with it."

"She seems really anxious for you to go. One thing sounds absurd, she has actually forgotten your proper name."

"I doubt if she ever heard it. I was small enough to be 'Master Kenneth' without any second name at all in the days when we visited her."

"I had better undeceive her."

"By no means," returned Kenneth, quietly. "She'd probably look on me as an impostor. I feel quite capable of bearing another title for a little while. It won't be for long. A week will be the utmost I can spend at the Court."

Aline had left the room.

A grave look settled on the millowner's face. It did not escape Kenneth's observation.

"Is there anything the matter, sir?"

"Nothing."

"You seem troubled."

"I am just a little perplexed."

Fairfax looked anxiously at his stepfather.

"Is it about Lady Aylmer? Of course I'll make myself agreeable to her if you lay such a stress upon it and I can accomplish it. I am not in the least a lady's man, you know."

"I wish you were."

Kenneth smiled.

"If I were the heir to a dukedom which stood in imminent risk of becoming extinct you couldn't bother yourself more over my single state."

"I never knew happiness until I met your mother. Surely you are old enough to remember her tenderness and goodness?"

A mist came before Kenneth's eyes.

"She was like Aline, only she had known trouble," he said, slowly.

"I can't explain my distaste for womankind, sir. I loved my mother tenderly. I am very fond of Aline; but the bulk of their set, the idle, giddy butterflies one meets in society, I look upon as nothing but pretty, dressed-up dolls, without heart or feeling."

"It isn't natural, Kenneth, to feel so unless—"

"Unless?"

"Unless you have had a disappointment. Is that it, my boy? Do you dislike women at large because you have liked one too well? Don't mind the question, Ken. I tell you frankly that with your own gifts and the wealth that may be yours some day there is no young lady in England to whose hand you might not aspire."

Fairfax shook his head.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, sir; but I never yet saw a face I should care to look at day after day. As to money, you have done too much for me already."

"You are my heir, Kenneth. The child, of course, must be provided for, but the bulk of my property *must* be yours."

"I don't want it, sir. I hope you'll live many a year to enjoy it."

Mr. Ford sighed. He looked so disappointed that Kenneth's heart was touched.

"Don't worry over it, sir."

"I must!"

"You said just now you were perplexed," said Fairfax, anxious to change the subject. "Won't you tell me what about?"

The old man passed one hand thoughtfully across his brow.

"Have you any knowledge of Blankshire, Kenneth?"

Kenneth shook his head.

"It's about a hundred miles off, sir, and I believe it's a fine hunting country. I think that's the extent of my information."

"You know that Aylmer Court is in Blankshire."

"I didn't. You see," said Ken, apologetically, "I never studied that book on 'Landed Gentry.'"

"Ah! Have you never wondered what I did with all my money?"

"Not exactly. I am not like Lady Aylmer."

"I have been busy making investments, Kenneth. For years I have had one object in view."

"And you have failed," suggested the young man, gently. "You are trying to tell me your speculations have turned out badly, and we must begin the world again. Well, I am young and strong, and the child does not care for luxuries. So that Aline has her books and flowers she will be content."

"Wrong again, my boy! My investments have succeeded admirably. The fairest estate in Blankshire will be ours in a few months."

He told the story of Carew's ruin without any tinge of triumph. Kenneth could see he was full of pity for his creditor.

"Now that it has come to the point, you see, though it is my own money, honestly earned, I don't like taking the place. I can't bear to think of the Master of FitzCarew turned out from his ancestral home as a beggar."

"He deserves it. I never pity a spendthrift."

"Still one pities his family."

"Is Mr. Carew married?"

"I believe so."  
 "I don't see what's to be done, sir. If you forego your claim for his life it would come just as hardly on his son. You can't stand out of your rights for ever."

"No."  
 "Depend upon it it will be best for them to get the wrench over as soon as may be. It must be like living with a drawn sword over their heads."

"Then you would let things take their course?"

"I don't see any help for it."

"Yes; only I thought, Kenneth, while you live in Blankshire you might make Mr. Carew's acquaintance."

"I shouldn't fancy he'd care about mine."

"Nonsense! You could invent some excuse for calling on him, and you might tell him if he has any hankering for the old place I'd never turn him out of it while he lived. I meant FitzCarew as a wedding present for you, Kenneth, but as there seems no chance of—"

"No chance of my requiring one you'll let Mr. Carew stay there for the rest of his natural life. Couldn't you intimate that to his lawyers?"

"I'd rather it went to him direct from you."

"I don't relish the errand."

"I can't bear to think of him being hunted out from his birth-place. I can trust, you, Kenneth. Though you jest about it, you would be the last to trample on a man that's down."

"I hope so."

"Then I shall write to Lady Aylmer, and tell her you will be with her the day after to-morrow. I hope you will stay over Christmas, Kenneth."

"You inhospitable man! As much as to insinuate you don't wish for my company on Christmas-day!"

"Well, you might be better employed. Truth to say, I have been a little selfish, Kenneth. Your sister was included in the invitation, but I kept that part of Lady Aylmer's letter to myself."

"Aline would suit the people at the Court much better than I shall."

"She might suit them too well."

"I see; you are afraid she might induce Sir John to consider his mother's wishes."

"Something of the kind."

"And wouldn't an alliance with a baronet gratify your paternal pride?"

"I love your sister as though she were my own child, Kenneth."

"I know you do."

"But I would rather see her lying in her coffin than decked in orange blossoms for John Aylmer. He is a bad man."

"I never heard much against him."

"His mother has held the reins too tightly. To outward eyes he is a model young man, but if he ever marry his wife's heart will ache some day."

"How did you find it out?"

"Never mind. I give you the hint. Don't bring him here."

"I shall seem very inhospitable; but, then, I forgot; Sir John Aylmer is far too great a man to visit simple tradespeople. I don't half like the idea of this visit."

"I daresay you will enjoy it, Kenneth. I depend upon you to act courteously in all things to Herbert Carew."

"I'll see to it;" and with this careless promise the stepfather had to be content."

### CHAPTER III.

THE drawing-room at Aylmer Court in the glow of the winter fire-light, the soft rays of a moderator lamp shed their radiance on the tasteful room, and ladies in all possible varieties of teagowns sat about holding cups of that refreshing beverage supposed to be dear to the hearts of the gentle sex. Besides the hostess and one or two matrons half-a-dozen damsels were present, and nearly every one had an attendant cavalier. The dainty silver and china sparkled on a gipsy table near her ladyship, and her keen eyes wandered with a well-pleased air to a low settee near the fire, on which sat Joan Carew, while near her, holding her tea-cup, stood the straight set features of Sir John Aylmer.

Joan was looking her best to-night. She wore a loose robe of some costly Indian fabric embroidered with all the skill of Eastern art, and confined at the waist by a silk girdle. The robe and girdle had both been found by our heroine in an old oaken chest in the lumber-room. Both had, doubtless, been the property of some old forgotten ancestress; but they could never have suited her better than they did their present possessor.

"Mr. Ford."

At the sound of the footman's announcement Lady Aylmer sprang up to welcome the new arrival. There was just a shade of patronage in her voice. She had pressed Mr. Ford very warmly for a visit from his son; but she wished that son fully to understand she did not consider him quite "of her world." The patronage was thrown away, however. Kenneth responded with a dignity specially his own, and my lady felt instinctively that this tall, broad-shouldered young

giant was a person of strong will and resolute mind. She inquired for his father and sister, presented him to Sir John, and then feeling she had done all the hospitality required of her retired to her gipsy table.

Joan Carew looked a little inquiringly at Sir John, while his mother was making herself agreeable to the new comer.

"A fancy of my mother," said the Baronet, grimly. "I can't think what she wants with the fellow."

Joan was puzzled at the tone.

"Do you mean you don't want him?"

"I think it a pity to revive old acquaintances that—were made years ago—under other circumstances."

"Is there anything queer about him?" and Joan touched her beautiful forehead significantly—"a little wrong here?"

"Oh, dear, no! My father was very kind to his a good many years ago," reversing the facts rather cleverly, "and my mother has never lost sight of the family from sentimental recollection of her husband. I daresay they're respectable people enough."

A very pretty little blonde was entrusted to Kenneth's care to take into dinner—a laughing, saucy-tempered girl—as utter a contrast to Joan Carew as fate could have imagined.

"You're a stranger?" said Blanche Child to him, as they took their place. "I'm quite sure of it, by the way you look about."

"I hope I don't stare very much."

"No, you only look as if you were taking us all in. Now, I have lived here for years, and I am quite prepared to be a walking dictionary of useful information for you."

"Do you mean it?"

"Certainly; first, though, tell me, have you any friends or relations here, for I should not like to offend you by criticising them?"

"I don't know a creature in the room except Lady Aylmer and her son."

"And you don't like them?"

"What makes you think that?"

"I know it. Well, I don't like them either, so I'll keep counsel."

"If you don't like them why are you here?"

"Because I possess a dear old father, who is fond of being at peace with all the world, and because, unluckily for me, Lady Aylmer thinks I can sing."

"Ah!"

"Now, why are you here?"

"The same reason as yourself."

"Meaning you also are supposed to sing?"

"No. I also have a father."

"Ah! Is he here?"

Blanche smiled and continued.

"Lady Aylmer has not been here many years. She used to hate me."

"I'm sure she couldn't!"

"Oh, yes she did. She suffered under a constant fear that Sir John should be wicked enough to like me."

"And hasn't he?"

"The temptation was removed, mercifully for him. He provided a substitute to suffer in his stead."

Kenneth looked at the third finger of her left hand.

"Not yet," said the young lady, laughing; "his martyrdom has not yet been accomplished. We are both as poor as church mice, and so—"

"And you are waiting?"

"Precisely so."

"Is he—the martyr—here?"

"He is somewhere on the Pacific Ocean. Fate made him a sailor, and though he means to retire and settle down at the very earliest opportunity, it hasn't arrived yet; meanwhile Lady Aylmer is happy about her son, and very polite to me."

"But she can't keep him shut up in a glass case to protect him from young ladies!"

"She has selected one young lady who is to save him from the wiles of her fellows."

"Do you mean Miss Carew?"

"You said you knew no one here?"

"No one; but I saw those two together, and—"

"And guessed. Well, I never thought they looked like lovers."

"Are they lovers?"

"I don't know. Lady Aylmer would like it; Miss Carew approves of it. I fancy it will be."

"Is she an heiress?"

"Only to very encumbered property, but then that property is the oldest in the county."

"And Sir John is wealthy; so—"

"So it would be a fair bargain?"

"Yes, only—"

"Only?"

Blanche hesitated.

"I don't know Miss Carew well—no one does. She cares for no one in the world but her father. Still she seems to me worthy of something better."

"Better than Sir John?"

"Better than being married, because her name is the oldest in the county. She always seems to me like someone with a sleeping soul." He shrugged his shoulders.



"Don't you admire her?"  
 "Shall I tell you my opinion after ten minutes' conversation with her?"

"Yes."

"I thought her simply the most disagreeable girl I had ever met." There was a lull in the conversation at that moment, and the words fell full and clear on Joan's ear. She could not doubt that they applied to herself. She did not care in the least what Mr. Ford thought of her. The opinion of a tradesman, as she had been told he was, could be no manner of concern to her; and yet, as she heard his verdict, this retort rushed swiftly across her mind.—  
 "I hate him! He has no business to express an opinion about me. I should like to be revenged on him!"

Perhaps she had her wish, reader; for it is certain that the keenest pain, the sharpest disappointment of Kenneth's life, came to him through Joan Carew.

#### CHAPTER IV.

THE days passed on to outward eyes pleasantly enough. The guests at Aylmer Court seemed thoroughly to enjoy the many amusements provided for them. Kenneth Fairfax threw off the gravity which had at first distinguished him, and appeared the gayest of the gay. He and Miss Child formed a friendly alliance, and spent much of their leisure together. They never flirted; there was nothing in their intercourse the absent lover himself could have objected to. Simply, Ken liked the little lady because she was so bright and genuine, while Blanche was pleased to find a man who amused her, and yet never strove to pay her compliments.

"Don't you feel curious to know how it will end?" she asked him, one clear winter's day, when a party of skaters were disporting themselves on the ice.

"I have yet to learn what 'it' is," he returns, quietly.

He knew perfectly well what she meant, for her eyes, brimful of mischief, are resting on the figures of Joan Carew and Sir John Aylmer, who were skating at a little distance; but somehow Kenneth would not understand the glance. Miss Carew had slighted him, and snubbed him, as no woman had ever done before. She had shown him openly she considered him unworthy to visit at Aylmer Court; and yet, such is the perversity of men, Kenneth had given more thought to her than he cared to own, even to himself, and he could not bear to think of her as condemned to drag out her life at John Aylmer's side.

"It is pretty, indeed!" smiled Miss Child. "He admires her, and she gives him every encouragement. I should say it would be publicly announced as soon as Mr. Carew arrives."

"Is he expected?"

"To-morrow."

"Is he like his daughter?"

"Yes and no. Joan is a true Carew; but her father has the kindest, saddest face in the world. He looks as if he would not hurt a human creature."

"Not like Miss Carew?"

Blanche looked at him, then spoke impulsively. "Why does she hate you so?"

"Does she hate me?"

"I think so. The very sound of her voice seems to change when she speaks to you. Have you offended her?"

"Not excepting by being here at all. I fancy Miss Carew thinks me unworthy the honour of being Lady Aylmer's guest."

"She is terribly proud. Well, poor girl; I don't know that her worst enemy would wish her a harder fate than the one she is choosing."

Kenneth hesitated.

"She is so beautiful," he said, slowly. "Surely no man could be hard on her!"

"John Aylmer is hard on everything. He will regard Joan as bought with his money, just as much his good and chattel as his horse or dog."

They were interrupted; there was the noise of a splash—a sudden cracking of the ice—and then the lake became one wild scene of cries and lamentations. Joan had ventured on an unsafe portion of the lake, the ice had broken, and now her fair form lay at the mercy of those cold, cruel waters.

Everyone expected Sir John to go to the rescue, but Sir John stood motionless. He talked of sending to the house for drags and men; but he never thought of risking his own life to save the girl whom everyone regarded as his *fiante*.

"It will be too late," said Blanche Child, tersely. "We are miles away from any house—help would come too late."

While she had been speaking, while Sir John still stood irresolute, Kenneth had thrown off his coat; before anyone could speak he had flung himself into the stream. There was a pause of breathless excitement; he was a brave swimmer, but the current was fast and swollen. Already Joan had risen twice, the next time must be the last. There was no whisper, no word; everyone gazed in one intense anxiety to see the issue. It seemed to them hours, instead of minutes, before Kenneth laid the dripping form on the bank—white—still motionless.

Blanche alone had presence of mind. It was she who remembered a tiny cottage not many yards from the park. She who insisted that Joan and her rescuer should both be taken there; finally, she who hung over the bed when the heiress of FitzCarew was stretched unconscious.

A doctor was soon in attendance, restoratives were administered; in a little while the dark eyes slowly opened, and Joan looked anxiously round the room.

"What has happened?"

Blanche bent over her.

"You fell into the water. Don't you remember the ice broke?—but you will be better soon."

Still that troubled gaze.

"You might have been drowned," went on Blanche, gently; "but you are quite safe now; the doctor says so."

"Who saved me?"

Blanche was conveniently deaf.

"Someone must have pulled me out of the water—someone must have risked his life for mine!"

"Yes!"

"Who was it?"

"I think you would rather not know."

"Nonsense!" and the pale face flushed. "But I can guess—it was Sir John?"

"No!"

"He was nearest to me!"

"Perhaps he cannot swim."

"Who was it then?"

"Mr. Ford."

A shadow of annoyance crossed Joan's face; it angered pretty affectionate Blanche even to see it.

"Would you rather have died than owe your safety to him?" she asked, sharply. "He saved your life at the risk of his own! Surely you can forgive him for not being one of your aristocratic friends?"

"I don't like owing my life to a common person like that."

"I fancy few common people have hearts and courage noble enough to risk their lives for a perfect stranger."

"Of course papa will thank him. I daresay we shall ask him to dinner. I suppose he would be above any other mark of gratitude?"

"I think you are beside yourself."

It was Joan's turn to look surprised now.

"Why?"

"Because you speak of Mr. Ford as though he were beneath you."

"He is beneath us. He is only here on sufferance, because Lady Aylmer knew his mother a great many years ago; they are quite common people."

"Who told you so?"

"Sir John."

"Oh!"

"And to do the man justice he does not attempt to deny it. He told me himself he worked hard in his father's interest."

"I honour him for it."

"I suppose he stands behind the counter in a black apron. I fancy they are ironmongers. Now, Miss Child, would you like to own your life to a shopkeeper's assistant?"

"I think if my life were in danger I should be too grateful to whoever saved it to consider his position."

Joan looked astonished.

"I suppose you think me too proud?"

"I think you deny yourself much happiness by your exclusiveness."

Joan blushed.

"I can't forget that I am a Carew of FitzCarew, the very last of the good old line."

Blanche looked grave.

"It would have been better for you if you had had a brother."

"Would it? I have my father, I want no one else."

"Not even Sir John Aylmer?"

Joan blushed.

"Who told you?"

"Is there anything to tell? I couldn't help seeing he wished to secure Miss Carew as mistress of Aylmer Court."

Joan put her little cool thin hand into Miss Child's, and said, wistfully,—

"You are engaged, aren't you?"

"Yes; but we shall not be married for ages—we are just as poor as two church mice."

"I never knew any girl who was engaged; will you tell me one thing?"

"Willingly."

"Does it make you happy?"

Blanche laughed.

"Of course it does."

"And yet you don't see him often!"

The other girl's face and voice softened indescribably, as she said,—

"But I know there is some one in the world to whom I am best and dearest. I know there is some one whom I love well enough to give up home, friends, even my dear old father, for his sake, and it makes me happy. I can't tell when it will be. I have no money, and Bertie is so poor, only I can trust him. I know his love can never fail me, and so I am well content to wait."

There were tears in Joan's eyes as she listened.

"I don't feel like that."  
 "I don't think two people ever do feel quite alike. If you love Sir John—"  
 "But I don't feel sure I love him!"  
 "You must know!"  
 "I don't! He is very pleasant and agreeable. I think he is very fond of me; and he has promised not to take me away from dad."  
 The last word told all. Blanche Child knew the tender spot of Joan's heart. She never spoke of her as cold or unfeeling again.  
 "Dear," and she put one arm lovingly round the neck of the orphan heiress, "you have no mother to help you, no sister. May I just say something?"  
 "Yes."

"Don't be in a hurry, wait and try to know your own mind; keep Sir John a few days in suspense, rather than give him a promise which may cost you all too dear."

They were interrupted; Lady Aylmer's carriage had come for Miss Carew. Sir John was in it.

"Come with us," said Joan, in a tone of entreaty.  
 Blanche could not refuse. She knew her presence would be regarded as a nuisance by the Baronet, but she never hesitated. She took her place in the brougham at Miss Carew's side.

Sir John had little opportunity for conversation with Joan. She leant her head wearily back in one corner of the carriage, and seemed to sleep.

Very few words were spoken until they reached the entrance to the Court. Lady Aylmer herself stood on the steps, waiting to receive them. By the very way in which she put her arms round Miss Carew, by the silken tone of her voice, as she addressed her, Miss Child knew that she believed she was addressing her future daughter.

"Poor child!" thought Blanche, as she walked off to her own room; "she has a heart hidden away somewhere behind that icy covering of pride and reserve! She will find it out some day, and love someone, but that someone will never be Sir John Aylmer! If she marries him, it will be the shipwreck of her happiness."

## CHAPTER V.

KENNETH FAIRFAX, or, to give him the name by which alone he was known at Aylmer Court, Mr. Ford, went straight to his own room, changed his dripping garments, drank the hot brandy-and-water brought to him by Sir John's own valet; and then drawing up an easy chair close to the blazing fire, he threw himself wearily into it, and sat down to think.

His could hardly have been pleasant thoughts, although he had that day saved a human life. There was nothing of exultation, or even of gladness, on his face; instead, a deep shadow rested on his brow, and his fine strong mouth twitched, as though in pain.

"I am a fool!" he muttered, angrily; "a miserable fool! to waste a thought upon her! She looks on me as something beneath her very scorn; she would believe no warning that came from me. I suppose I must let it go on, and see her marry him, even though I have the certainty he will break her heart. I have half a mind to cut the whole concern, and go home."

He pushed one hand rapidly across his aching brow. How he longed for home, for the quiet, peaceful calm which reigned at his stepfather's house, no tongue could tell. The very thought of going there brought relief to his fevered brain, and yet he drove the thought away.

"It would be cowardly!" he muttered; "cowardly to run away from sorrow, and after all the mischief is done now! Her face would haunt me, even if I never saw it again. How could I go home and face the dear old dad's questions, and own to him that I had left his request unfulfilled, and not even seen the Master of FitzCarew, just because I had seen too much of his daughter?"

His musings were interrupted. The door opened abruptly, and Sir John Aylmer entered. The Baronet, to do him justice, had never joined in the slights Mrs. Carew delighted in heaping on his guest; he had shown himself, when they were alone, especially friendly towards Kenneth—almost too much so, indeed, for the latter's comfort there. Sir John was one of the fastest men about town, and to hear of his devotion to ballet-dancers and actresses was hardly soothing to the man who, to his own misery, had learnt to hold Joan Carew all too dear.

"Of course, you know what I have come for, Ford?" began the Baronet, cordially. "You have saved my future wife's life, and, I assure you, I shall be grateful to you till my dying day! I can't swim a bit! It's terrible to think what might have happened to Joan had you not been there!"

"Joan, my future wife!" The words told their own story.

Kenneth nerved himself by an effort.

"You have nothing to be grateful for?"

"Nothing! My dear fellow, I assure you I don't count the future Lady Aylmer's life as nothing."

"Anyone in my place would have done as much."

Sir John smiled.

"I don't think so. Miss Carew is wofully proud, and I fancy she has given you little cause to think kindly of her."

Kenneth turned the subject adroitly.

"I did not know your engagement was an accomplished fact?"

Sir John looked sheepish.

"We settled it last night, subject, of course, to the Master's consent; but I don't think he is likely to refuse it."

An irresistible desire assailed Kenneth to know whether Sir John had any idea of his prospective father-in-law's real circumstances.

"Will such an alliance satisfy your mother?"

"Thoroughly. Of course, there are heavy mortgages on FitzCarew! I shouldn't wonder if it took twenty thousand pounds to clear them; but, then, think of the position! Carew can't live many years—he looks now like a man with one foot in the grave—then I shall be lord of one of the oldest estates in England."

"Miss Carew is very beautiful!"

The words escaped him almost in spite of himself.

Sir John was not at all offended. He regarded them as a compliment to his own taste.

"Isn't she!—so thoroughbred! I expect she will be the finest thing out next season."

He spoke of Joan with almost as much enthusiasm as if she had been a horse.

"And you'll settle down into quite a domestic man!"

Sir John laughed a little uncomfortably.

"Oh, we shall not go in for that sort of thing," he said, carelessly. "Joan is a sensible girl. She won't expect any nonsense. She will be Lady Aylmer. I shall give her a handsome allowance for dress and pocket-money. She will soon understand not to ask inquisitive questions."

Kenneth turned away with something very like a groan. It was quite lost upon Sir John. The Baronet never saw anything that was not very plain.

Mr. Ford was downstairs very early that evening. The drawing-room was empty when he entered it. He stood on the hearthrug, his eyes fixed upon the glowing embers, his thoughts busy with the chain of circumstances that had brought him to Blankshire. So absorbed was he that he did not hear the soft rustle of a silken train, and looking up suddenly he saw Joan Carew standing at his side.

A little paler than usual from her accident, a little grave and more serious than her wont, her eyes and smile a little softened, she looked to the man who loved her more beautiful than he had ever seen her. Involuntarily he started.

"Miss Carew?"

"I wanted to thank you," she spoke, with a perceptible effort.

"They tell me you saved my life."

"There is no cause for thanks."

His manner nettled her.

"Perhaps you think my life so valueless it is worthy of no gratitude."

"I think," he said, gravely, "your life is what you make it—you hold your fate in your own hands."

"I suppose we all do," she said, haughtily. Then, Mr. Ford, you decline my thanks?"

"Nay, I accept them, because I am conscious how bitter a thing it is to you to offer them."

"Bitter?"

"Do you think I am quite blind?" he asked, slowly. "I know quite well you would rather have owed your life to anyone in this house than to myself."

She could not deny it, so, womanlike, she let the remark pass.

"My father will be here to-morrow—he will know better how to thank you."

"I shall be glad to make Mr. Carew's acquaintance."

"And the Master has great influence," said Joan, proudly, "though he lives so quietly he knows many powerful people, and I am sure he would do anything for the man who saved his daughter's life."

"I don't understand," said Mr. Ford, coldly.

"I mean," said Joan, impassively, "if you are ambitious, and feel you are above your present position, my father would use his influence for you. He might get you a clerkship or—"

"Thank you, but I am quite content."

"Content!"

"Aye, I am a plain man, Miss Carew, and a business life suits me."

There was no time for another word—the other guests were entering. It was noticeable that evening that Miss Carew was the gayest of the gay. She laughed, she talked, she was the life of the whole party; and Sir John Aylmer, who hung over her chair with love-like devotion, felt well satisfied with his *fiancée*. Already he saw himself sought after and coveted as the husband of the loveliest woman in London.

It struck Mr. Ford as a little odd no engagement was proclaimed, but he imagined the Aylmers thought it best to await the coming of Mr. Carew. He wondered not a little what manner of man was the father of the proud heiress, and he felt not a little curious to meet him.

He had not long to wait. The next afternoon he heard the buzz of welcome, and going downstairs he saw Joan clinging to the arm of a sad, earnest-looking gentleman, whom instinct told him was her father.

"Miss Carew," he said, gently, "will you present me to the Master?"

Joan had no alternative. ■



"Papa, this is the person who saved my life."

Hubert Carew's hand was ready, his voice was half-broken with emotion. Instead of thanks in set, formal words he only murmured,—

"God bless you, sir! You have saved me all that made my life worth the living for."

The tears stood in his eyes as he wrung the young man's hand. From that moment Kenneth liked and respected Hubert Carew.

"You did not tell me your friend's name, Joan," said her father, suddenly. "You must let me know to whom my gratitude is due."

He looked at Kenneth, but our hero was incapable of words. To claim the name of Fairfax would be to bring on himself numberless questions, and he could not answer "Kenneth Ford." He knew full well what a bitter sound that word must have in the Master's ears.

"Is it a secret?" asked Hubert, pleasantly. "Joan, my dear, finish your introduction. I can't go about addressing this gentleman as 'my daughter's preserver.'"

"His name is Ford," said Joan, almost sullenly, and then she walked off, her head very erect, her step very dignified.

Hubert turned to Kenneth—there was no pretence, no false pride about him.

"I think I can understand. You are the son of Mr. Ford, of Briarleigh, and you have come here to see the estate so soon to be your home."

"You are mistaken," said Kenneth, shortly. "I am here at Lady Aylmer's invitation."

"But you are the new master of FitzCarew?"

Kenneth shook his head.

"My father will be that. I have lingered here, at his desire, to make your acquaintance, Mr. Carew, and to assure you, in his name, of our sympathy."

Carew sighed.

"Your father has been a generous creditor."

"He wishes to be. I have been charged to ask you if it would be any convenience to you to keep FitzCarew for your life—to assure you of our reluctance to see you leave the old home of your race."

The Master's answer was prompt.

"It is a kindly offer."

"And you accept it?"

"I refuse."

"Perhaps you are like your daughter—you refuse any service from a person in trade! I fancy Miss Carew would rather have lost her life than owed it to a shopkeeper's assistant."

"I don't understand."

"That is her name for me. I believe she thinks I stand perpetually behind a counter equipped in a black linen apron."

Carew's face flushed.

"She is inordinately proud, it is her only fault. You will forgive her?"

"Willingly; and you will think of my father's proposal?"

"I dare not."

"You will not."

"I dare not. Mr. Ford, I like you; there is something in your manner inspires my trust. I will treat you as a friend. I dare not accept your offer because my days are numbered."

"Numbered!" aghast.

"Aye. I carry about me the seeds of a fell disease; there is no knowing when the blow may fall."

"All the more reason for not deserting your old home."

"Nay; think of Joan."

"Miss Carew will be Lady Aylmer."

"I hope so."

"Then—"

"I must be frank with her husband. No man shall have power to say I deceived him. Whoever marries Joan shall know the exact truth, that she is the penniless child of an exiled man; her beauty is her only dowry."

Kenneth felt moved by the other's candour.

"With such a face as hers I don't expect money will make any difference. Mr. Carew, will you do me a favour?"

"If it is in my power."

"Do not tell your daughter of our business relations. Miss Carew would feel the loss of her home more bitterly if she guessed I was ever to be its owner."

"Have you quarrelled with Joan?"

"We have hardly exchanged a dozen words."

"She is generally so warm-hearted."

"Not to her inferiors; but I must not judge her hastily. She meant to be kind to me; she even promised me your influence to obtain a clerkship if I had the ambition to rise above my present position."

"A clerkship!"

"She thinks all business means shops. She has no idea of the real state of affairs."

"That your father is the richest man in Briarleigh, and your wife the most influential woman in the county."

"I have no wife."

"I beg your pardon. My thoughts must be confused, I am sure. I fancied your father meant the old place for you as a wedding present."

"I fancy he does," and Kenneth tried to smile; "only he is in despair because I can't find a bride to share it."

"And you have no mother?"

"No. I have a pretty, fairy-like sister, but my father would never spare her to come and preside over my establishment; so, as far as we are concerned, FitzCarew will be a kind of white elephant."

The two men shook hands and parted. The Master was no sooner in his own room than Joan appeared.

"What a time you have been, dad? Why did you let that horrid man keep you?"

"Joan, he saved your life."

She tossed her head.

"Of course he did, dad; but that doesn't make him a gentleman!"

"He is one of the finest gentlemen I ever met."

Joan pouted.

"I believe you say that on purpose to tease me."

"Did I ever tease you, Joan?"

There was such a sad weariness about his tone that the girl threw her warm young arms about his neck and kissed him.

"You are tired, dear!"

He was thinking he was so tired that but for one he would gladly have lain down his weary load and been at rest. She realised dimly there was something amiss, and nestled the least bit closer to him.

"Why did you stay away so long?"

"I could not help it."

"And is the business settled?"

"Yes, child."

"Are you glad?"

He sighed. He was glad of the relief, but he knew too well that it had come all too late for him.

"Glad for your sake, child."

"And are we richer?"

His arm was close round her; he was studying her face, and he knew the time had come, the time to tell her, not that she was nameless, but that he was no longer Master of FitzCarew.

"Much poorer, Joan."

"Poorer!"

"Aye, my darling, bear it bravely. Very soon we shall have to leave Blankshire."

Her bosom heaved.

"We can't leave it, papa."

"But if we must, Joan?"

"It can't be. You are Carew of FitzCarew. You couldn't sell the dear old place!"

His breath went and came.

"Did you never guess I was in debt, Joan?—never hear that FitzCarew was mortgaged?"

"Yes," and her colour deepened; "but Sir John says if he marries me all that can be put right."

"Sir John says so."

"Yes. He asked me to be his wife, dad, and I said yes."

Great silence. The girl grew uneasy.

"Aren't you pleased?"

"Do you love him, Joan?"

"I don't think I believe in love," the girl said, half recklessly. "Sir John is very fond of me. I daresay we shall do very well."

And this was Audrey's child—Audrey, whose whole life had been nothing but a longing for love, who with her dying lips told him all she had suffered, all she had sorrowed, was as nothing for love's dear sake.

"Aren't you glad?" repeated Joan.

"If he makes you happy. Joan, I have a strange wish; I don't want to stay here over Christmas. Let us go home and spend our Yuletide at the Park."

"Lady Aylmer!"

"If she is in her son's confidence she will know this is our last Christmas together, and will understand my wanting you all to myself. Joan, my darling, do this one thing for me."

He pleaded as though it were for his own sake, knowing all the while it was for hers. Not for worlds would he have had his daughter Lady Aylmer's guest while he broke to her son the news he must break before the engagement between Sir John and Miss Carew was publicly announced.

The Baronet lost no time in craving a private conversation with Mr. Carew, but the Master's answer was decisive.

"I am taking Joan home in two or three days' time. Come over there and say to me what you like. I can't discuss my daughter's future away from FitzCarew."

In those two or three days Kenneth saw a great deal of his father's debtor. He grew to regard Herbert Carew with a deep, chivalrous pity, and to feel as if he would fain have restored him to his lost honours at any cost.

"I wish I had never come here," he said, impetuously, one day when he had been playing chess with the Master in the library.

"Why?"

"It makes me feel so mean. If we had calmly robbed you all these years I don't think I could feel much worse."

Hubert smiled.

"You must get rid of such thoughts."

"I wish I could."

"For my part I am thankful you came."

"Thankful?"

"Aye, to have seen the man who is to fill my place, and rule in my old home. I have been but a bad custodian of the Park. When a

great sorrow eats into a man's life it takes the spirit out of him. I have never held up my head since the day of Joan's birth. I am glad to think a firmer, stronger spirit than mine will have the fulfilling of the duties I neglected."

"You must have loved her well," thinking of Joan's mother.

"Too well, I fancy."

"Is Miss Carew like her mother?"

"Not in the least. She is built of a stronger, firmer mould. Trouble killed my Audrey. I sometimes think trouble will soften her daughter."

"She is not hard to those she loves," eager in her defence.

"Ah, but how few she loves! Will she ever cling to Sir John Aylmer as her mother clung to me?"

"I hope not."

Carew started.

"What do you mean?"

"Only that Sir John would never repay a woman's devotion. A wife who kept him in order and never let his follies wound her would be the fittest helpmate for Aylmer."

"Well, it will be settled soon."

"I thought it was settled."

Carew shook his head.

"We go home this afternoon, and he is coming to see me to-morrow. I suppose, Mr. Ford, most men have bitter moments in their lives, but I doubt if many are called on to suffer the humiliation I must bear to-morrow."

"You are too sensitive, sir. No man worth the name could think less highly of you or Miss Carew because her face was her fortune."

"You don't understand."

Kenneth thought him wandering.

"I think I do."

Carew shook his head.

"No poverty could have lined my face as trouble has done these nineteen years—no mere lack of wealth could make me shiver as I shiver now at the prospect of my interview with Sir John Aylmer."

An awful suspicion came to Kenneth. Had Hubert Carew's beautiful young wife died mad? Was the germ of insanity in Joan's blood?

"I have not known you a week," went on the Master, hurriedly, "but something makes me trust you. Only one man on earth knows my secret, and he is at a distance. I should like to tell you my miserable story, and see what you advise me."

Kenneth could not believe his ears as he listened. The story seemed to him too strange and wonderful; only there was that in the Master's dark eye and pale, worn face which seemed to vouch for the truth of every word. When the story was over there came a long, long silence; then, looking up, Hubert saw a strange dimness in the young man's eye.

"She must never know it."

That was all. No declamations, no protestations, just those few determined words, and Hubert felt as though a fresh strength was given even by the resolute manner of his new ally. He must be bold.

"I could not hide it—not even for her sake."

"I fancy he will be alarmed at her loss of fortune. Better he should draw back on that ground than—"

"Then refuse her because she is nameless. I understand. You think I should keep back my wretched confidence until—"

"Until you are sure poverty makes no difference to his wishes."

Hubert shuddered.

"And if he marries her she will be at his mercy. In any moment of irritation or annoyance he may fling the truth in her face; and she is so proud, so true a Carew in heart and spirit, she would never get over the disgrace. It would kill her."

Sir John Aylmer betrayed no annoyance at the postponement of his happiness.

"The Carews are awfully proud," he told his mother. "I shouldn't wonder if the old gentleman thought he did me an honour than otherwise by letting me assist him."

"You are sure it is a safe investment?"

Sir John laughed.

"Twenty thousand pounds to be lord of FitzCarew! I fancy few people would refuse it."

"He may be more embarrassed than you think. It may require more money to free the estate."

"I shouldn't mind twenty-five, if it was an understood thing he resigned all claims at once in Joan's favour. I'd allow him a few hundreds a-year, and he could live quietly somewhere on the Continent."

But selfish as she was even Lady Aylmer exclaimed at this.

"You never dream of separating them, surely? Why, their attachment is something wonderful. I should have soon thought of parting a flower from the sunshine as Joan from her father."

"I should part them, and pretty thoroughly, too," growled her son.

"Lady Aylmer must learn to put her husband first. Besides, I shouldn't care to have any broken-down gentlemen hanging about my house. When I marry Joan I mean to be Master of the Park, and of her too."

He had involuntarily raised his voice. He and his mother were sitting in a small boudoir opening to the conservatory, and Joan Carew, standing among the flowers, caught the sound of her own

name. She never meant to listen. She was moving rapidly towards the door to warn them of her presence when Sir John made his last brutal speech. He had gone too far—he had lost for all time the chance of marrying the last of the Carews. With one bound the girl stood before him with flashing eye and heaving bosom.

"Sir John Aylmer," she said, in tones of icy composure, "I have been unwittingly a listener to your last words. I am thankful to the chance that has revealed to me your sentiments, and I beg unhesitatingly to refuse the honour of your hand."

"I assure you I—"

"Do not trouble yourself to invent excuses. I may be the daughter of a ruined man"—and her eyes flashed scornfully—"but I am the last descendant of a grand old race, and I would scorn to ally myself with anyone who deemed he made a sacrifice by marrying the daughter of the Master of FitzCarew."

"You will think better of this," said Lady Aylmer, quietly, "when you have seen your father."

"I am going to see him now, to ask him to order the carriage, after what has passed. I would rather not enjoy your hospitality another hour, Lady Aylmer. Sir John, I have the honour to wish you a last good-bye."

And then, calm and dignified, yet with a strange sinking at her heart, Hubert Carew's daughter left the room.

## CHAPTER VI.

A GLOOM had settled over FitzCarew; the old servants had been astonished beyond measure at the return of their master and Miss Joan a day before they were expected. No reason had been given for the sudden arrival; and tried and trusted as are the few retainers kept at the old house, none dared ask the motive, for there was a pride in the young lady's eye, a dull, silent grief on her father's face, which told more plainly than words could do that some sore evil threatened the house of Carew.

"There's ill-luck coming," said the old housekeeper, as she returned from attending Joan to her room without one kindly word of thanks. "My young lady is rarely vexed."

"And the Master has death written in his face," returned another. Perhaps they were right. That night, in the still hours of darkness, a messenger from FitzCarew galloped off to the nearest town in search of the doctor. Hubert Carew had been found still and motionless in his chair. He refused to answer even to his daughter's voice, and the panic-stricken household sent off in hot haste for medical aid.

It was not the doctor who attended Joan after her narrow escape from drowning, but a young man, a comparative stranger to the place. He never quite forgot the sight of the pale, beautiful heiress, on her knees before the couch, her hands chafing her father's cold, still ones, her voice entreating vainly every tender name to wake up and speak to her.

"He is not dead!" she moaned. "Oh! tell me that. I can bear anything in the world if only he is alive!"

"He is not dead."

With a quiet air of authority the doctor insisted on her leaving him with his patient. His experienced eye had at once discovered what was the matter, and he wanted to spare Miss Carew the sight of the agony of her father's return to consciousness.

Joan submitted to a stronger will than her own; she let the old housekeeper lead her from the room. Then the restoratives were applied, and in half-an-hour, blue to the very lips, with an expression of keenest pain on his face, Hubert Carew opened his eyes.

"Is this death?" he asked, slowly. "I beseech you, tell me?"

Dr. Brown hesitated.

"Do not deceive me," pleaded the sufferer.

"I never deceived anyone in my life."

"And it is," naming a terrible disease. "I have often feared it. Will there be any getting better, or is this the end?"

The young doctor shook his head sorrowfully.

"Why did you keep such a thing secret? Why not have sent for me before?"

"I was not sure."

"I might have done something had I been called in six months before."

"And now?"

"I fear it is hopeless."

"Ah! I thought so," his hand clutched nervously at a damask table-cover. "Tell me one thing, how long?"

"A few weeks, it may be a few days only. There will not be much more suffering, rather a gradual sinking into rest."

"Rest!"

"Rest from all pain."

"Oh, how gladly I would welcome it! How I have yearned for it all these years, save for Joan!"

"Your daughter?"

"My only child, my motherless little girl."

"She is very beautiful," said the young doctor, musingly. "She will have many friends."

"Beautiful and poor," murmured Hubert Carew, sadly. "It is a terrible combination."

There was a little pause; then there came a sharp tap at the door, and Joan entered without waiting for permission.

"You must not excite him," said Dr. Brown, very gently; and then he went out and left them together.



The next day it seemed an established fact that the Master was ill—no one spoke of his getting better. He just lay on the sofa in the library, and Joan crouched on a low stool near him, with the same thought that neither could put into words, that very, very soon a power, too strong even for love to defy, would sever them.

Joan was called away for a minute in the afternoon. When she came back she found that Mr. Carew had dragged himself to the table and was struggling to write a letter.

"Papa you must not, you ought not!"

"I must, Joan."

"Is it to Mr. St. John?"

"No."

"Let me do it?"

He hesitated, the big drops of perspiration stood on his brow. Joan saw it and took the pen from his trembling hand. She started as she saw the words he had traced,—

"Dear Mr. Ford."

"Papa!" and there was a ring of indignation in her voice, "were you tiring yourself, perhaps making yourself ill again, to write to him?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"I wish to see him."

Joan gasped.

"Take the pen, my darling," said the Master, sadly, "and write the letter—or I must."

That prevailed. She sat down.

"What am I to say?"

He was quite ready with the words.

"I am very ill. Will you come and see me to-morrow at eleven?"

Joan held it for him while he signed his initials. Then she directed the note, rang the bell, and sent it by special messenger to the Court. This done she came back, and took up her old position at her father's feet.

"Are you vexed, sweetheart?"

It was his pet name for her. Her sullen displeasure could not be proof against it. She could not be angry with him when it might be he was soon to leave her for always.

"Not angry."

"Sorry then?"

"I can't understand."

"Let me try and make you understand. Let me try and tell you what you ought to have known years ago, only I kept from you weakly because I could not bear to vex you."

She bowed her head upon his breast, and he went on,—

"Joan, have you ever thought of what would happen if I died?"

"Don't," with a pent-up sob.

"I must, dear. Think, Joan. It is in the course of nature you should lose me some day. Supposing I died ten, twenty years hence, what did you suppose would happen?"

"I never thought."

"Think now."

She looked up with swimming eyes.

"I should live here just as I do now, and people would call me the Lady of FitzCarew. I should never be rich or great, because of the mortgages, but I should live here."

"No, my darling; my difficulties are greater than you imagine. Already, Joan, FitzCarew has passed from us."

"It couldn't."

"It has."

"But—"

"But it is another's, Joan. My child, if I live I will make a fresh home for you; if not—"

She burst into tears.

"You must live," she sobbed. "I cannot do without you. Let FitzCarew go, but stay with me."

"I wish I could. Child, don't you think it wrings my heart to feel how lonely you will be?"

"That was why you wished me to marry Sir John?"

"Yes."

"What has Mr. Ford to do with this?"

"It was his father who advanced me money years ago—who is now master of FitzCarew."

"Father!"

"Bear it bravely, darling."

"But he is not a gentleman?"

"Indeed he is."

"I see it all. You were never a business man, and he has taken advantage of you?"

"On the contrary, he has treated me with the greatest kindness."

"You are so good—you think so."

"Mr. St. John, who is a business man, himself agrees with me."

"And he will be master here?"

"Yes."

"With his shop and low tastes?"

"He has no low tastes."

"Dad, I would rather set fire to the old place. I would rather pull down every stone of its old walls than he should live here."

"Joan!"

"It is true."

He sighed heavily.

"If you had only known your mother she would have taught you differently."

"You mean I am wicked?"

"No, only proud, Joan. My darling, try and think of it in another light."

"I can't."

He looked at her wistfully.

"Nothing in the world will soften your heart but love; love conquers pride."

"I shall never love anyone."

"You are not fretting for Sir John?"

"Fretting! I am only glad I found out his real character. I don't believe in love."

Punctual to a moment Kenneth made his appearance at FitzCarew, and was ushered at once into the Master's presence. Joan was absent; she would not risk a meeting with the man she regarded as her enemy.

"I am very sorry to see you thus, sir!"

"The struggle is almost over. You do not think it a liberty that I sent for you? I know I had no right, but much is forgiven to a dying man."

"I should have come even had you not sent. I have a favour to ask you, Mr. Carew."

A faint smile crossed Mr. Carew's face.

"I can think of nothing in my power to grant," he said, simply.

"I am not going to ask you to get me a clerkship, as Miss Carew suggested. I fear I am not ambitious. I have never thought of learning my father's business."

"You must not think of Joan's foolish words. Poor child, her pride is likely to have a fall."

"It is about her I want to speak to you."

"And about her I sent for you. Your father has shown himself very generous to me. Do you think he would do this one thing more, and let my child stay here a few months after my death, until she has time to collect her thoughts and face her position bravely?"

"I am sure he would, but—"

"But you think it unadvisable."

"I think—"

"Speak plainly; I am not likely to take offence. Besides, I like you. You remind me of one of my boyhood's friends, Edmund Fairfax, a captain in the Life Guards."

Kenneth started.

"Did you really know my father?"

"Your father!"

"Yes, mine and Aline's. Our mother was a widow when she married Mr. Ford; of his love for her, his unwearied tenderness for us, I cannot speak. Half the world has forgotten. We are not, in blood, his children. Lady Aylmer had invited me to her house as Mr. Ford. It never entered into our heads to set the mistake right."

"You are a descendant of one of the oldest families in England, and Joan—"

Kenneth smiled.

"I shall never claim kindred with the Fairfaxes. I cannot forget their cruel neglect of my young mother. I never thought to be glad I was not the son of my kind old stepfather, and yet such is my weakness and folly. For her sake, I can almost rejoice."

The Master looked bewildered.

"You have promised to listen to me," said Kenneth, impulsively.

"You shall send me away afterwards if you will, but you must hear me first. I love your daughter!"

"Joan!"

"Yes," and the young man's face grew bright as with some deep gladness. "I love her with my whole heart and soul. She is the only woman whose heart I have ever cared to own. She has given me nothing but scorn, and yet, such is my madness, I worship her."

Hubert Carew wrung his hand.

"She is not worthy of such love," he said, huskily. "She is the light of my eyes, but she has requited your kindness ill. I wish you had not told me this."

"I could not help telling you. Now, will you give me any hope?"

"Hope of winning her?"

"I shall never win her," said Kenneth, sadly, "until she is my wife. She loves no one else, of that I am certain."

"No one."

"Then give her to me. You say you must leave her, and the thought troubles your last hours. Give her to me; I swear, most solemnly, to cherish her as Heaven's best gift!"

"But surely you must know she does not like you?"

"She hates me," was the calm reply. "I know it, but I am willing to take my chance. I would rather have Joan for my wife and know I shall never be more to her than I am now than lose her."

"And you know all—that she is nameless!"

"I know she is not, in the eyes of the law, your heiress, but she is your child—she loves you. For your sake, I believe, she would even stoop to marry me."

"And you could be happy with a wife who did not love you?"

"I think I could make her happy. I should settle this place on her at once. I mean my father would."

"And he?"

"He knows, and leaves me free to act as I will. I know, if she would let him, he will give your child a father's love!"

The Master was silent; every instinct of his nature was against the proposed union, and yet—

"Will you speak to Miss Carew?"

"I can't. It seems to me, Kenneth, you are just blighting your life!"

"I have asked myself whether it would be blighting hers. I think not. I believe, Heaven helping me, some day I shall win her love. She must never know I am a Fairfax of Fairfax until she has consented. I will owe my wife's hand to no ancestors; in fact, I am so generally known as Ford, I see no reason to tell her at all. The register must be signed in my true name, but no one, save the clergyman and ourselves, need be the wiser."

"And you propose to marry soon?"

"At once, by special licence. Mr. Carew, I implore you to consent, she is so young and fair; think of her battling with the world, think—"

Hubert Carew buried his face in his hands.

"I accept," he said at last, slowly. "It is a cruel sacrifice that you offer, but I know if you can win my child's heart she will repay you!"

"And you will mention it?"

"I would rather you did that!"

"I?"

"If you go into the drawing-room, I will send her to you."

He went.

Barely a quarter of an hour, though to him it seemed an interminable interval, and the girl he loved stood before him as pale and motionless as when he drew her from a watery grave!

"Will you sit down?" and he drew a low chair forward.

"I prefer to stand."

"Has Mr. Carew told you of my wishes?"

"The Master of FitzCarew said you wished to speak to me. Be brief, if you please; I am anxious to return to him."

"Then you do not know—"

"I know that this house is yours, and everything in it. I know that you have come to gloat over our misery—it was worthy of you." His face grew white with pain.

"Miss Carew, this is a cruel calumny! I am here at your father's request. I have asked him a favour, and he has referred me to you."

"A favour!"

"Do you know that he is very ill?"

"He is dying!"

"And his one anxiety is your future. To soothe his last hours I think you will conquer your pride, and listen to me."

"I am listening."

"I want you to be my wife!"

"Your wife?"

"Yes. I want your father to have the comfort of knowing that he leaves you mistress of your old home; that so far as wealth and human power can go, you will be shielded from all sorrow."

"You must know I don't like you!"

"I know that you regard me as one of your menial servants. I am not asking you to like me—I ask you to be my wife."

"I see," said Joan, half aloud, half to herself; "you want a high-born wife—you offer your wealth against my long descent. It is a simple bargain!"

"No!" almost thundered Kenneth; "it is no bargain. I love you as my own soul! but I am to the full as proud as you. If you will be my wife, I promise you—nay, I do more, I swear, by my mother's dead memory—that no word of love from me shall ever trouble you. You shall be entirely free, save that you must bear my name, and from time to time, I fear, suffer my society, to avoid censorious tongues."

Joan looked at him with a troubled light in her splendid eyes.

"Do you know that two days ago I was engaged to another man?"

"I know it."

"And you are willing, in spite of that?"

"I am more than willing—I am anxious. I repeat my offer. Be my wife, mistress of FitzCarew. Soothe the anxiety which troubles your father, secure to yourself the old home you love so well."

"At the price of a loveless marriage?"

"I have heard you say you do not believe in love?"

"I do not."

"Then there can be no danger!"

"Danger!"

"Don't you see," he said, gently, "the only danger that could threaten you from this step? If you were my wife you could never be free to marry anyone else. If our hands never touched, our lips never met, yet as long as I lived you would be bound to me as irrevocably as the tenderest wife who ever wore a wedding-ring."

"I see."

"That is to me the only difficulty. But you say you don't believe in love!"

"I don't."

"Then—"

"Listen," she said, suddenly. "I love my father so well that I could do anything—even this—for his sake. Would you promise me never to let a word of blame rest on his memory? He has been imprudent, rash, perhaps, but never wicked. He can't help being unfortunate. If I marry you will you never throw his misfortunes in my face?"

"Whether you marry me or no I shall respect Mr. Carew to my

dying day. Will you think over this? I will remain here for an hour. Will you send me word?"

She bowed her head, and left him.

Perhaps the suspense tried her as much as him. Perhaps she wanted the matter fixed unalterably, for in little more than half the time he had mentioned a little note was brought to him. Ken's strong hands trembled so he could hardly open it:—

"Let it be as you wish, for his sake; only remember, though I wear your wedding-ring we shall be strangers for all time."

"J. C."

Mr. Ford rang the bell, and the housekeeper appeared. Very courteously he went up to the old woman, and told her he was to marry her young lady. She almost started with surprise.

"It is quite settled," he said, fiercely. "Of course, under other circumstances, there would be no need for haste, but Mr. Carew's state seems to me alarming. He has no near relations to care for his daughter, so we have resolved to have the ceremony here at once by special licence."

The woman stared.

"Miss Joan married to-day, sir?"

"Not to-day. I must go to London for the licence and other matters. I cannot get back before Thursday. Will you arrange everything for six o'clock?"

"It's Christmas Eve, sir!"

So it was. His old father and Aline expected him at home. There would be such glad some preparations at Briarleigh for his return, and the two loving hearts there would be disappointed; but he never hesitated.

"I know; but it cannot be helped. May I depend on you to arrange all details? Mr. Carew is too ill to be troubled, and Miss Joan is too occupied with him to think of other things."

And then he rode away.

"Joan!"

It was her father's voice. Joan had crept back after writing her letter, to find the Master asleep. He was awake now, and looking into his daughter's face with eager, loving eyes.

"Yes, dad?"

"You have seen Mr. Ford?"

"Yes."

"And you have consented?"

"He said you wished it."

"He is a good man, Joan!"

"It doesn't matter," she began, then checked herself abruptly, for instinct told her her father would be sorrowful if she let him know the extraordinary conditions she imposed on her lover. "So that you are pleased, nothing else signifies."

"I am more than pleased! You have robbed death of its last sting!"

"Couldn't you stay?" she whispered. "Oh, father! best beloved! how can I part from you!"

"You will have your husband."

She hid her face on the pillow beside his; he stroked it fondly, as he answered,—

"You do not love him now, but some day your heart will break, and be all his own. I look at it as impossible, Joan, that affection such as his should not win for itself a return at last!"

Joan answered nothing.

The next days passed as in a dream, only there was an undercurrent of preparation in the house, and the maid who waited on Joan brought a white dress for her mistress to try on.

"Take it away!" said Miss Carew, impatiently; "I shall never wear white again!"

"But, Thursday, miss!"

"Christmas Eve. What should I want with a white dress then?"

"For your wedding, Miss Carew."

Joan opened her eyes.

"Ah! I had forgotten!"

"Everything is ready, miss. This white silk will look just the thing for a bride."

Joan shivered.

"It will be cold; and it is not like a real wedding. I will wear my black velvet."

Nothing could move her; in vain they expostulated; Miss Carew was firm. When Christmas Eve came it found her in the soft black velvet gown, holly berries at her throat and in her hair.

"She looks a picture!" said the old housekeeper, admiringly; "but not a bit like a bride; and it's dreadfully unlucky to be married in black!"

Joan did not meet her bridegroom until all was ready for the ceremony. The clergyman, who had known her all her life—no other than Blanche Child's father—stood ready in surplice and stole. Blanche Child herself, bidden by Mr. Carew's special request, stood behind Joan. Perhaps she alone noticed how white and haggard looked the bridegroom, how icy and statue-like his bride.

It was very short. The responses were prompt and audible. A very short time, and it was over. Joan Carew was a wedded wife, and Kenneth was tied for all time to a girl who hated him.

There was a pause; then Mr. Child addressed Joan by her new name, and wished her joy. She answered like a person in a dream; then she heard her husband's voice.

"Will you allow me to speak to you, Joan?"



Half unconscious she followed him to the drawing-room. The blazing yule log made a ruddy glow, the Christmas firelight brightened up the whole apartment; holly and mistletoe were plentifully strewn around. Kenneth noted it all dimly as he placed his wife in a low chair by the hearth—his wife, Heaven help him, who did not love him.

"Mr. Carew seems better to-night."

"Much better."

"The doctor tells me there is no immediate danger, so I think of leaving you to spend your Christmas together. It seems hard you should be troubled with a stranger."

She trembled so violently that he took up a thick crimson shawl and wrapped it round her.

"Don't you think it best?"

"Won't people talk?"

"I think not. Your father is so ill they will understand. I should only be a *gêne* upon you. And if your people want me—"

She was bitterly hurt.

"Pray do not consider me in your movements," rising.

"Sit down. I will not keep you another moment. Your servants have my full address, and will telegraph for me at once if there is any change."

"Very well."

He glanced round the room.

"How cheerful it all looks in the bright Yuletide! I wonder if you and I shall ever spend a Yuletide together, Joan; whether years will ever draw you nearer to me."

"Your promise," she began—

"And I shall keep my word, have no fears. You shall never be more to me than you are now, Joan, unless it is of your own free will."

"That will be never."

"We will not discuss that. Will you be angry if I ask you to accept this?"

He had put into her hands a daisy aigrette, made entirely of diamonds, an ornament of no mean value, as Joan knew instinctively. She drew back.

"It is not from me," said her husband, coldly. "I shall never press gifts upon you. It is my father's wedding present, and I cannot bear to go back to the old man and tell him it is rejected."

Joan softened.

"He sent it to me?"

"He sent it with his blessing to my wife."

"Does he know?"

Kenneth understood.

"No; I could not tell him. He wrote, and hoped you would be to me what my mother was to him. I could not find it in my heart to tell him after that."

There were tears in her eyes. She took the jewel, and placed it in her hair.

"You will thank him for me?"

"Yes."

"You are going to him now? What are those flowers?" for she had caught sight of a bouquet lying on the table.

"My sister sent them for me to give to you. She fancied you would wear no bridal flowers save of my choosing, and so she made my father bring her to London to find those she liked best. It was a childish fancy, but she is so young; she couldn't understand a courtship such as ours."

Joan's hand was stretched out for the flowers. Pretty helpless things! it hurt her woman's heart to see them lay there neglected—but Mr. Ford calmly gathered them together and tossed them into the flames. Then he said, abruptly,—

"I will not detain you longer. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

And so, without even a hand-clasp, the wedded pair parted, in all the gladness of that bright Yuletide. Joan went back to her father's couch, Kenneth rode off into the darkness of the winter's night with an aching heart.

## CHAPTER VII.

It comes to most of us, at some time or other in our lives, to hide our deepest sorrows from those we love best in the world; and so it was with Kenneth. He spent his Christmas at home and then hurried back to his wife, enjoining upon her that she must travel, telling her he would leave her free as air, as she wished it. After a stormy scene he gave her his ultimatum.

"Mrs. St. John and one of her married daughters are proposing to go South, and I have arranged for you to accompany them," he said.

"Oh!"

"Mrs. Irwell, the daughter, is about your own age. She struck me as a very sweet, amiable girl; I think you are sure to like her."

"I hate sweet, amiable people."

"The St. Johns were your father's friends."

She would not soften even at that allusion.

"What shall you do?"

"I? Oh! I shall go home."

Joan threw herself back on the sofa, as though to intimate the interview was at an end. Kenneth wished her good-night, and left her.

They did not meet again till Monday, and then Mrs. Ford was surprised to see her maid seated in the brougham which was to convey them to the station.

"Where is my husband?" she asked, sharply.

"The Master has ridden on, ma'am; he wished to secure a reserved carriage."

The Master! The title grated on Joan's ear.

But the reserved carriage proved to be only for her and the maid. Kenneth travelled in a smoking compartment. He made his appearance at King's-cross in time to hand his wife to the platform, and at that moment Marston St. John joined them. Kenneth turned to them at once.

"If you will take care of Mrs. Ford I will see to the luggage."

The lawyer led Joan to the waiting-room.

"My dear," he said, kindly; "you have lost your father, and yet I must congratulate you. I never saw anyone who took my fancy so much as Mr. Ford."

"Papa liked him."

"And papa's daughter. How do you like the idea of this foreign tour?"

"Very much."

Her pride was up in arms. She would never let the St. Johns know that she was sent into exile against her will. As far as in her power was she would keep her own counsel, and let no one suspect the true state of affairs between her and her husband.

"It is a pity Mr. Ford could not get away to join us."

"His time is not his own."

"Ah! I wonder he can spare you."

"He thinks me looking ill."

"Well, I prophecy we shall bring you back hale and hearty; we are going solely on Nettie's account."

Enter Kenneth, rather flushed, and evidently in a hurry. He led the way to the brougham, handed in his wife, and stood, hat in hand, until the carriage was out of sight.

"He returns by to-night's express. I wish he could have dined with us," commented hospitable Mr. St. John.

"He never said good-bye to me; he never promised to write to me," thought poor Joan, and, throwing herself back into her corner, she shed bitter tears behind her *crêpe* veil.

And there was another difficulty. Her purse held just half-a-sovereign. How was she to manage with that sum for several months? How could she write and ask Mr. Ford for money? He ought to have thought of it; his neglect was abominable.

But when kind Mrs. St. John had installed Joan in a pretty bedroom and left her alone the first thing she saw was a letter, which had evidently come by post, and was addressed to her in her husband's writing. She took it up a little eagerly, then sat down to read it, hoping, in spite of herself, that his written words would be more tender than those he addressed to her by word of mouth.

She was disappointed. The letter ran thus:—

"DEAR JOAN,—I have made every arrangement with Mr. St. John, so that you need feel under no obligation to him during your travels. You will, of course, need money for your *ménu*, pleasures, &c. I enclose a bank-note. Mr. St. John will, I am sure, cash it for you, or act as your banker if you object to the care of money. Should it be insufficient send for more. There is nothing would annoy me more than your denying yourself in any way. Wishing you a pleasant journey,—Yours sincerely, "K. F."

"It is monstrous!" cried Joan, speaking aloud in her vexation. "He expects me to take his money, and he treats me like—" She stopped for want of a simile.

The note had fallen unheeded to her feet. She took it up, and glanced idly at the amount. A thousand pounds! Evidently her husband was no miser, since he reckoned her private expenses at fifty pounds a-week!

"I shall send it back to him," was her first resolve.

But the thought of the single half-sovereign in her purse stopped her. Eventually she took the note to Mr. St. John.

"Will you take care of this? I shan't want a quarter of it to spend."

"All right, my dear. Mr. Ford is a liberal husband!"

"I suppose he has plenty of money?"

"Evidently!"

"I daresay he thinks me extravagant. I shall make this last for years."

"That won't be necessary."

"Why?"

"Because your private income is four thousand a-year. This note represents a quarter's allowance."

Joan gasped.

"But—"

"You have married a rich man's son. Mr. Ford came up to London directly he heard of the engagement, and settled FitzCarew and his revenues on you. I believe he wished to give the estate to his son; but your husband preferred the existing arrangement."

Joan gave a little sigh.

"I wish—"

"What do you wish, my dear? If it lies in human power to gratify your desires I don't think you will have to wish in vain."

"I wish we had been married as other people are!"

The lawyer was puzzled.

"I should not have thought you cared for show and grandeur." Then to his surprise he saw that she was crying.  
 "My dear, my dear, you must not!"  
 "Don't you see," said Joan, gently, "he gives me all—home wealth. All I had was my old descent! If we had had a grand wedding, if it had been noised about far and wide that he married a daughter of FitzCarew, it seems to me it would have been fairer."  
 "Fairer!"

"Yes—less one-sided. Now I take all and give nothing!"  
 "You give yourself," said the old lawyer, gravely. "My dear, I am very sure your husband values nothing in the world so highly as your love."

They went abroad, but the change was not all pleasure to Joan. Netty Irwell was, like herself, a wife of very recent date. Unlike Joan, her husband was a man of very small means; it was impossible for him to leave his occupation. When his wife's health was threatened he had to entrust her to his parents; but every post brought loving, tender letters, full of regrets for her absence, full of ardent longings for her return. Joan, who had more gold than she knew what to do with, would have bartered it all gratefully, gladly, for one such letter as came to sweeten Netty's exile.

She saved one pang—letters came early, and were all taken to their recipients' bed-rooms—she had not to sit at the breakfast-table the only one unremembered. With rare tact no one asked her why she wrote so seldom. No one inquired or doubted that the few letters she did write were to her husband.

"We think of going to Paris next week," Mrs. St. John said to her one fair April day. "Netty is so much better that we may safely venture. Do you like the idea, Joan?"  
 "Very much."

"Mr. Irwell is coming over to meet us—he has managed a week's holiday. It is a pity your husband could not do the same."

Then they had asked him, and he had refused. Poor Joan! It was humiliating to hear such things from a third person.

"He is very busy."  
 "Yes, and he has set his heart on being at FitzCarew to welcome you home. He has most kindly invited Mr. St. John and me to accompany you."

Joan's face fell. Politeness required her to express pleasure, but she could not find words.

Mrs. St. John went on quickly,—  
 "But though we are old people we have not forgotten our youth, and I am quite sure after such a separation you will enjoy having each other alone for a little time, so we mean to send you down to Blankshire under a trusty escort, and follow in a few weeks."

Joan hugged the dear old lady.

Mrs. St. John did not think it necessary to say they had not told Mr. Ford of their intentions.

"I can't make it out," she said to her daughter, later on. "I am sure Joan loves her husband, and your father says he just worships the ground she treads on, and yet—"

It was visible to them all. Try as they would to hide their doubts they could see quite plainly there was something wanting to Joan's married felicity.

The month in Paris passed off well, but it seemed to Joan to have leaden wings. She wanted to be at home; she wanted to see with her own eyes what changes had been made there.

She was gazing from the carriage window long before the platform came in sight, and, in spite of herself, her heart beat wildly when she recognised her husband.

He met her as though they had parted the day before, handed her out, and then turned for her companions.

"Where are the St. Johns, Joan?"  
 "They could not come—they were wanted at home."  
 "I am afraid you will be very dull."

He placed her in the luxurious carriage, drawn by dashing bays, took his seat at her side, and asked gently if she were quite well and strong.

"Perfectly."  
 "Ready for a north-country summer?"  
 "Yes."

"Ah, you will believe in my prescriptions in future. There have been great changes in Blankshire since you went away."

"I have heard nothing—you never wrote."  
 "I remembered our compact."

Joan wished the compact at the bottom of the sea.

"As I went away for my health you might have cared to inquire how I was."

"I did inquire."  
 "I never had the letter."  
 "I wrote to Mrs. St. John every week, and she answered by return of post."

Joan bit her lips.  
 "What are the changes you spoke of?"  
 "Aylmer Court has changed hands."

Joan tried very hard not to blush, and failed miserably.  
 "Indeed, how is that?"  
 "Sir John was involved in some disastrous speculations, and failed. His name was in the *Gazette*, and everything went to the hammer."

"I am very sorry."  
 "I thought you would be. I feared so."

"I mean I am sorry for his mother. I always had a liking for Lady Aylmer."

"And I detested her."

"Why?"

"Because she set up for being a fine lady."

"And do you detest fine ladies?"

"Don't put me through a catechism," he said, with a little laugh.

"Have you no curiosity to know who owns the Court?"

"No one I know."

"Someone who knows you then."

"You don't mean your sister?"

"Aline? Oh! know. I mean the Rector's daughter."

"Blanche Child?"

"She is not Blanche Child now. The man she was engaged to

came into a lot of money, took the name of some eccentric old godfather, and settled down as a country gentleman."

"And married her?"

"To be sure. That was all he wanted money for."

"They used to be very fond of each other."

"They are still."

Joan gave a little sigh.

"Some people have everything."

"They waited a long time," said Kenneth, slowly; "five years, I think. Then old Eastcourt died, and they were made happy."

"They would have been happy anyhow."

"Perhaps."

"Blanche had no ambition."

"I suppose not. You had better give her a little of yours."

"I have none."

"Too much, I fear. I suppose with beauty such as yours it is natural. You would have graced a coronet!"

"I wish you wouldn't tease me."

"I did not mean to. Seriously, Joan, you know you would have been happier with a title. You might have loved an earl or a marquis. It was cruel of me to take advantage of your grief and loneliness, and make you the wife of a plain man of business like myself."

"I don't believe in love," she said, sharply. "I have told you so before."

"We are getting on dangerous ground," he said, coldly. "We are like two strangers. We ought never to get beyond the trivialities of small talk."

Joan answered nothing, only when the carriage stopped, and she put back her veil, Kenneth saw that she had been crying. His heart ached then for her and for himself.

## CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER all, things never happen quite as people expect. Mr. and Mrs. St. John found themselves quite unable to leave home again after their long absence, and, consequently, Joan and her husband were left alone at FitzCarew.

Looking back on that time afterwards Joan often wondered how she lived through it. She was luxuriously provided for in every way; her comfort was studied, Kenneth treated her with every possible courtesy, but the heart seemed to have gone out of his kindness. She had nothing to complain of, nothing to wish for, only she was wretched—unutterably wretched.

And he saw it. He knew that all his love had not made her happy, and at last he grew to deplore this hurried marriage almost as much as she did, but only for her sake. Only one person suspected aught of the state of affairs.

Blanche Eastcourt, happy in her own married life, could not fail to see the failure of her friend's. She never put her knowledge into words until, one June afternoon, the Master of FitzCarew came over, and asked to see her alone.

"Is anything the matter?" noticing with woman's instinct how pale and careworn he seemed.

"I am going away."

"Going away?"

"It is the only thing to do. Mrs. Eastcourt, I married knowing my wife's heart was not mine. I thought I could be brave and live out my life at her side, knowing I could never be more to her than a stranger, but I find the struggle too hard."

Blanche looked her sympathy.

"But you cannot leave her alone!"

"I have engaged a companion for her. Her old governess came down last week on a visit. Miss Dormer will be quite ready to let her stay lengthen into years."

"And Joan?"

"It will be a relief to her. I think at times she almost hates me."

"She cannot."

"She does. Well, it is all I can do for her—to go away. Mrs. Eastcourt, will you do this one thing for me. So far as in your power lies, will you be kind to my wife?"

"I will."

"She is so young," he said, wistfully, "and so beautiful, it seems cruel to leave her; and yet it is for her sake."

"She may find out she is not so indifferent as you think for."

He shook his head.



"I have lost all hope."

That very evening after dinner he went into the drawing-room—the room where he and Joan had made their fatal compact. His wife was at the piano, singing that sweetest of all love-songs, "Where sparrows build." Each note fell on his heart like a knell. Was it true, after all? Had she really loved John Aylmer? Was the loss of him the old sorrow which woke and cried, "Joan, I want you!"

He did want her, his whole heart yearned for her. Hers stirred strangely at the words; but she only said, coldly,—

"What do you want to say?"

"Only good-bye."

"Good-bye!"

"I shall be gone to-morrow before you are awake."

"This is a very sudden journey."

"No; I have been a month at FitzCarew. A business man has not much time at his own disposal."

"When shall you be back?"

He played half-nervously with a white rose in a glass on the table.

"I don't know."

"But you must know. What am I to say when people call and ask when I expect you home?"

"When you expect me back," he corrected, quickly. "Oh, you can tell them business affairs will probably detain me some time."

She stamped her little foot.

"You care for nothing but money."

"And yet it has brought me little happiness."

"Aren't you happy?"

"Are you?"

She shook her head; a tear trembled in her eye. They were nearer an understanding than they had ever been before.

"I am very sorry," he said, brokenly; "I wish I could free you from the yoke you find so heavy. Believe me, Joan, if tears of blood could blot out our marriage, it should be blotted out."

Her pride was aroused then; she thought he repented for his own sake.

"A gentleman would not say such things!"

"And I am not a gentleman? Well, Joan, after to-night you will be free from my presence for a long time."

"Am I to stay here all alone?"

"Miss Dormer will remain as your companion."

"I don't want her."

"You may be glad of her. Then you have your friend, Mrs. Eastcourt."

"She is not my friend. I hate her."

"Joan!"

"I do," cried poor passionate, wilful Joan. "She has everything in the world. She knows I am wretched, and she comes here to gloat over my misery."

"You are totally mistaken."

"I am always mistaken according to you. I believe you think Blanche Eastcourt perfection."

"I think her a tender-hearted, loving woman."

"Why didn't you marry her instead of me?"

He smiled in spite of that pain at his heart.

"There were two drawbacks to that scheme, Joan. [She did not love me, and she was engaged to some one else."

Joan was angry. She would not see his outstretched hand; she would not echo his good-bye. She just walked coldly and silently from the room.

"Of course he won't go," thought the wilful girl, as she sobbed herself to sleep. "He couldn't go like that, without even touching my hand."

He never had touched it—never since the moment when he placed his ring upon it, and that other time she knew not of, when, senseless, she had been carried in his arms.

Joan meant to get up early, but hours of sobbing wore her out. She sank at last into a heavy feverish slumber, and it was past nine o'clock when she opened her tired eyes to see her maid at her bedside.

"Will you get up, ma'am, or shall I bring your breakfast here?"

"Have they breakfasted downstairs?"

"Miss Dormer breakfasted at seven o'clock with the master."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"Mr. Ford gave orders you were not to be disturbed, ma'am. He had a very wet drive to the station. It came on to pour just as the dog-cart started."

Then he had really gone. Joan closed her eyes.

"And breakfast, ma'am?"

"I don't want any."

But Miss Dormer hearing this carried up a tray to her ex-pupil with her own hands. She pitied the unhappy girl, and made much of her; but she little guessed the misery at her heart.

Joan had plenty of self-command. She knew she must guard her secret from her kind old friend, so she ascribed her paleness to a headache, and suffered herself to be dressed and placed on a sofa in her boudoir. She was hardly there when Mrs. Eastcourt was announced.

"I cannot see her."

The message was delivered, and Blanche drove away, not in the

least offended, only wondering sadly what she could do to unite this pair, who were so near and yet so far.

She heard from others that Mrs. Ford had recovered from her indisposition; that she seemed the gayest of the gay; that now her crêpe was laid aside. She went to every gaily Blankshire afforded. She heard all this, and she met the lonely wife herself often in society. She saw a smile on her lips, heard the ripple of her laughter, and turned away with a shiver of pain.

"Alan, what is to be done?" she asked her husband one morning after a picnic, where Mrs. Ford's flirtation with a young officer had been the theme of every tongue.

"Ford ought never to have left her."

"I believe she loves him, and is just pretending not to care."

"I don't see what we can do."

"He is so good and brave, and she is very lovable. Why can't they be happy?"

"Why don't you go and talk to her?"

"She is always out when I call."

"I expect, Blanche, there is only one person who could soften her."

"Kenneth?"

"Kenneth's sister. Don't you remember, Blanche, when we stayed there just after our wedding, what a fairy sunbeam she was?"

"Joan would shut her heart against her just because her name was Ford."

"It isn't Ford."

"Alan!"

"Don't you know neither Kenneth nor his sister are really old Mr. Ford's children. Their name is Fairfax."

"When did he tell you?"

"Just before he left. It seems there have been two or three unexpected deaths in his father's family, and now there is every chance of his some day succeeding to the title and becoming Earl of Linross."

"If Joan only knew!"

"It would harden her still more. No; their one chance of happiness is for her to love him before she knows he can make her a countess."

"Shall I write to Lina, Alan?"

"It could do no harm."

Some days later the sweetest of fairies was sitting in Blanche's own morning-room, cosily lounging in a low chair, her feet on the fender, for Ken had been absent some time now, and winter was here again.

"Now, do you agree to my plot, Lina?"

"I want to see Ken's wife, but I know I shall not like her."

"Why?"

"She makes him so unhappy."

"And she is miserable herself. Lina, it would be a grand thing to bring them together."

"But how can I?"

"You can make her love you. If only Joan loved some one it might save her."

"Save her from what?"

"Herself."

"Won't she suspect?"

"No, she has never even heard the name of Fairfax. When you are friends you can let out you live at Briarleigh; then, perhaps, she will speak of her husband."

"I feel like an arch conspirator. Ken believes I am in London."

"Never mind."

"Why don't you try to make things right; you have known Joan for years?"

"She distrusts me, I fancy," and here Blanche laughed, as though to show how ridiculous the bare idea was to her. "She is actually jealous of me."

Mrs. Ford neglected the Eastcourts persistently; she was always "not at home" when Blanche called. She was distant when they met abroad, but she could not bring herself to be openly rude. When Mrs. Eastcourt wrote she had a young friend staying with her, to whom it would be a great pleasure to see the picture-gallery of FitzCarew, Joan not only acceded gracefully, but invited the two ladies to lunch.

"This is famous!" said Blanche. "Now I shall be ill and send you alone. I expect you to work wonders, my little friend."

It chanced that Miss Dormer was laid up with a bad cold, so the mistress of FitzCarew was obliged to receive her guests alone. She wore a soft black silk, its folds suiting her exquisite figure; her hair was done in thick, Grecian coils. She looked very lovely, but no one could have taken her for a happy woman.

"I wish I had not asked them. The girl will be a country bumpkin, and Blanche Eastcourt will look at me reprovingly, and ask if I have heard from Kenneth. Then Captain Granville is coming this afternoon, and she'll be shocked."

But when she rose to meet her guests she was astonished to see only one visitor—a slight, fairy-looking girl, dressed in purple velvet, trimmed with silver fox. She looked so sweet and fragile, so nervous and distressed, that Joan's very heart went out to her.

"I am very sorry," began the stranger gently, "but Mrs. Eastcourt is ill. There was no time to let you know, so she hoped you would excuse my coming alone."

In age there was, perhaps, two years between the girls; but one was a child, the other a woman with an aching heart.

"We must introduce ourselves," said Joan, with the strange charm

of manner she knew so well how to use. "I have not even heard your name!"

"I am Lina Fairfax. I am making a long visit to Mrs. Eastcourt."

"I have never met you there?"

"I only came last week."

"And you are old friends?"

"Hardly that. They stayed with us a little while in the spring, and they were very kind to me."

The two were soon seated at a pleasant *à la carte* repast. Every distrustful thought had gone out of Lina's heart. She had been ready to hate Kenneth's wife for making him unhappy; she could only love this beautiful, sad-faced girl, who was so evidently lonely.

She was taken all over the house. Joan showed the pictures, only when she came to Hubert Carew's portrait her eyes filled with tears.

"Forgive me," she said, brokenly; "but he only died on Christmas Day, and he was all I had in the world!"

Aline slipped her hand into Joan's, and looked at her, with her blue eyes full of sympathy.

"I have a father, too," she said, "and I think if he died it would break my heart. I can't remember my mother. Dad is just all I have."

"It was the same with us—and he died!"

"But you are married?" said Aline, simply.

Joan blushed.

"Yes; but my husband is a great deal from home. He does not care for Blankshire."

"Why, I thought—"

She broke off abruptly; but Joan's bright eyes were fixed on her with an eager, questioning gaze.

"You are Mrs. Eastcourt's guest," she said, slowly. "I daresay she has told you I made my husband so unhappy he did not care to stay here! I know she thinks me a specimen of unkindness."

"Oh, no! she never said so. Only—"

"Only what?" said Joan, a little sharply.

"My home is in Briarleigh," said Aline, gathering courage, "and I have known the Fords all my life. Mr. Ford told me once Blankshire was the loveliest county he had ever seen."

"You know my husband?"

"I have known him ever since he was a child. He and my father are sworn friends. I was praising up the beauties of our village one day, and Mr. Ford said if I had seen Blankshire and FitzCarew I should never think Briarleigh pretty again."

Joan shivered, as though struck by a sudden pain. Why had not Kenneth married this beautiful creature? Did he repent now not having done so?

"Have you seen Mr. Ford lately?"

"Oh, yes! He often came to our house before he went abroad."

White to her very lips grew the mistress of FitzCarew.

"Abroad!" she said, faintly. "I did not know."

Aline would not look at the pale face. She went on firmly,—

"He sailed for Africa a few weeks ago. I think he had to see his father's colonial agents."

Joan sank on to a seat. Her self-command broke down, and she cried as though her very heart were breaking.

"I am his wife," she said, slowly, "and he lets me hear of his absence through a stranger!"

"I am very sorry," said Aline, simply. "I never dreamed that—"

"I did not know!"

Aline knelt down at Joan's side, and put one arm round her waist. "He will come back," she whispered. "I know papa told me he would not be gone long. They expect him in December."

"But not back to me! He hates me! He told me once if tears of blood could blot out our marriage he would shed them willingly!" She had broken into a passionate fit of sobbing.

"He could not," said Aline, firmly—"he could not!"

"He said so. It was in June, before he left me. Fancy, we have been married a year, and we have been together only one month!"

"Perhaps he thought you would be happier without him?"

"I am miserable!"

"He looked miserable, too," said Aline, gently, "when first he came to see us after he came back from Blankshire. I thought he looked ten years older, and he never smiled."

"He was regretting his mistake."

"What mistake—loving you?"

"He never loved me!"

"Do you remember last Christmas?"

"Is it kind to ask me? Can I ever forget it?"

"Last Christmas," whispered Aline, "I was staying at his father's house. I heard him tell them of his marriage. I never heard such joy in any man's voice, such deep content, as when he said those two words, 'my wife!'"

"I used to think he loved me."

"He loves you now."

"But he has left me!"

At that moment a servant came to say that Captain Granville was in the drawing-room. A burning blush swept over Joan's face.

"Tell him I am engaged."

Left alone she turned quickly to Aline.

"Have you ever met the Captain?"

"Never!"

"But you have heard of him?"

"Yes."

"What—"

"I would rather not tell you."

"But I want to know!"

Trembling like an aspen-leaf Aline answered,—  
"They say if he had come a year earlier he would have been your choice."

"I hate him!"

"I thought you liked him?"

"I must amuse myself. My husband cares nothing what becomes of me. The Captain worships the ground I tread on; why should I treat him with rudeness?"

Aline looked wistfully up at her with her deep blue eyes.

"Do you love your husband?"

There was no parrying that question.

"It is no use my loving him; he hates me!"

"Don't you think you will drift farther from him if you listen to Captain Granville?"

"There is no harm in the Captain!"

"Would Mr. Ford like his being here so often?"

"I don't know!"

Mrs. Eastcourt's carriage was announced, and Joan saw her visitor prepare to depart. It seemed to the lonely wife a ray of sunshine was to leave her.

"I wish you were my friend!" she said, slowly.

"I should like to be!"

"Mrs. Eastcourt would tell you I am far too bad."

For all answer Aline kissed her.

"We are both motherless," she said, timidly, "and I like you. I will be your friend if only you will let me."

"And you won't tell the Fords?"

"No."

"Do you write to her?"

"Who?"

"Miss Ford."

"Oh, no!"

"Don't you like her?" a little sharply. "I fancied she was a good sort of a child, not refined and fairy-like like you, but honest and stupid."

"I never thought whether I liked her. Your husband is devoted to her."

"Ah! how she must hate you!"

"Her one desire is to see you. I have heard her ask again and again when you were coming to Briarleigh."

"Never!"

"Perhaps you may change your mind?"

"And you will come again?"

"Gladly!"

Joan went back to her solitude in the drawing-room, but, to her surprise, it was not unoccupied. Captain Granville was sitting by the fire.

"I sent word I was engaged!"

"But I was not in a hurry."

"I did not wish to see you!"

"Be merciful to your slave!" he said, in a voice of gallantry which jarred on her every nerve. "I have ridden eight miles on purpose to see you."

"I told you I was engaged!"

"With a good little girl from the country; of course, I understood."

"You understood what?"

"That you did not wish the innocent dove to know upon what very intimate terms we stand. She might carry the alarm to Blankshire and warn her brother."

"Her brother!"

"You are surely aware that the young lady who has just left you is your husband's sister?"

"I don't believe it."

"It is a fact."

"She introduced herself as Miss Fairfax."

"That is her true name."

"But—"

"But your immaculate husband has deceived you somewhat. He is the stepson of Mr. Ford, the manufacturer. From a fit of sulks with his father's family he has chosen to drop his real name, but he is none the less Kenneth Fairfax."

"One name is as good as another."

"You take it easily."

"I never upset myself for trifles."

"He married you, and neglects you shamefully, and yet you defend him!"

"I am not aware that he neglects me."

"Joan," and the Captain looked into her eyes, "why did not fate send me here a little earlier—in time to save you from your captor?"

He had taken her hand, but she wrenched it from him with a jerk.

"How dare you—oh! how dare you?"



"Come," he said, coolly, "you can't be surprised at my declaring my affection. Haven't you led me on for weeks?"

"No!"

"Nonsense! All the county knows that I am your favoured admirer, that but for a certain gentleman in Yorkshire you would be my very own property."

"This is insult!" cried Joan. "Leave the room!"

For all answer he took both her hands and held them captive, so that she had no choice but to listen.

"I have loved you ever since I saw you. From the moment I heard your voice I swore you should be mine. Confess but for the shadowy tie which binds you to another you would readily be mine?"

"It is not a shadowy tie."

"It is a legal marriage," he said, stiffly. "Of course, with your experience, you were careful to secure that. Every one knows that Ford married you in a moment's generosity, and would gladly be free from you."

Her cheeks burnt.

"He was rich and I was poor, but even penniless it is no disgrace to marry a Carew."

"Ah! you regard the match as an equal bargain. Poverty and a grand old name versus riches and trade. I daresay most people agree with you, but I happen to be behind the scenes."

"What do you mean?"

"That you have no right to resent my attentions, that you have flung yourself at my head and tried to attract me, as might have been expected from your origin."

"My origin is known to all," said Joan. "I am the last of the Carews, and as such I once more order you to leave this house."

Her hand was on the bell, but he interposed.

"Before you summon your servants to expel me you had better listen to the truth. You have indulged in very strong language to me—you have rejected my affection with scorn. I tell you in return that were you free ten times I would not now entrust my honour to your keeping. Were Kenneth Fairfax dead to-morrow I would not marry his widow, the nameless, outcast daughter of Hubert Carew."

The girl had clasped her hands in wild despair. Something in his tone made her certain his words were true.

"Your mother was not your father's wife," he went on, brutally. "The late Mrs. Carew died only a few days before her husband. You who have boasted of the Carews have never really been a Carew at all! You are nothing but the nameless daughter of the last of the race, and as such Kenneth Fairfax married you."

He was gone.

When Joan came to herself, when she could open her eyes again she was lying on the sofa in her own boudoir, and kind old Miss Dormer, aroused in haste from her own bed, was watching over her.

Dr. Browne, the medical attendant who had been at her father's last illness, was there. To him Joan turned, with a piteous question,—

"Is it true?"

"My dear Mrs. Ford, what has troubled you?"

"Is it true?"

"Is what true? The servants found you in a swoon on the floor. We suppose you over tired yourself in the picture-gallery; and when Miss Fairfax left you, you just reached the drawing-room and fainted."

The poor eyes wandered round the room.

"Was I quite alone?"

"Perfectly. There had been no visitors save Miss Fairfax. Captain Granville had been denied."

Still that piteous, anxious expression.

Dr. Browne had sent everyone away. He felt there would be no rest, no calm for that troubled spirit, until the brain was released from its load of fear.

"Now, tell me what troubles you?"

"I cannot."

"Don't say that. I am not an old man, Mrs. Ford, but I am old in experience. Your father trusted me—won't you do the same?"

"I can't."

"Do you think I imagine your illness a common one? I know, perfectly; you fainted from some terrible shock."

"Yes."

"Had you bad news of Mr. Ford?"

"Oh, no."

"Can't you be frank? Was it that a villain presumed on the careless freedom of your manners? As I drove up I met Captain Granville on horseback; he seemed to have come from FitzCarew."

"Yes."

"Do you know he is no fit associate for a good woman—that the best houses in the place are closed against him?"

"I thought people were too particular."

"And you liked him?"

"He amused me. I liked to make people think I was not fretting at my husband's absence."

"I expect myself you have been eating your heart away about it." She blushed.

"And you have been playing with edged tools in the shape of Captain Granville."

"He will never come here again."

"I am glad to hear it."

"But he told me—Oh! I cannot tell you, it is too cruel, too wicked."

"I can guess. He told you that Mr. Ford was the son of Colonel Fairfax and great nephew of the Earl of Linross."

Joan gasped.

"He never told me that."

"Then your husband will not thank me for letting out his secret. He told me he cared nothing himself for rank or honours, but he thought it would please you to be a peeress."

"It wasn't that."

"Listen," said the Doctor, gently. "You are very young, your whole life's happiness is at stake. Let me tell you one thing. You are the wife of a man I honour more than any other, whom I count it a privilege to call my friend. Whatever calumny was said against him is false."

"It wasn't against him."

"What was it?"

"He said that I—my mother——"

Dr. Browne guessed all.

"The scoundrel!"

"It is not true, then?"

"My poor child, listen. It was your father's dying charge that this should be kept from you. It was your husband's great desire that the truth should be never hinted at, but the truth is more merciful now." And then, in simple, kindly words, he told her the story of her young mother's life and death.

"And he knew it?"

"Who?"

"Kenneth."

"Of course. He told your father it was his one excuse for hurrying on the wedding. You were so proud that if a glimmering of the truth reached you, you would never listen to him."

"And I laughed at him for his trouble, while all the time he was an earl's grandson, and I was nameless."

"He never valued his relationship to Lord Linross but for your sake. He loved you too well to care for anything but your heart."

"And I have scorned him."

"You have only been married a few months. You have your whole life before you to make atonement."

"But he has gone away!"

"A word from you will recall him."

"He will never come back."

"Nonsense!"

"I shall never see him again; besides," and her cheeks flushed, "if this gets abroad how shall I face him?"

"Never fear. Granville may frighten a woman, but he is too much of a coward to brave a man's anger. He has behaved villainously to you, but I don't think he will dare to tell the story to anyone else."

"I wish I were dead."

"Why?"

"I am so miserable."

"You are only twenty," said Dr. Browne, cheerfully. "Just put your pride in your pocket, and be happy for the rest of your life."

"But if he won't—"

"Won't what?"

"Forgive me?"

Dr. Browne smiled.

"He loves you."

"He did once."

"Men like that don't change."

But that scene had sad effects on Joan. The next morning she was weak and tired. Before a week had passed it was all over the county that she was dying—that the cruel fever was sapping her strong, young life.

Aline Fairfax and Blanche Eastcourt were her devoted nurses, and many were their consultations if they should send for Kenneth.

"He would be too late, and it would break his heart," said Aline; "besides, we ought to know what she wishes."

But long before that dreadful struggle between life and death was over news came from Africa that Kenneth was returning. He would be in London on the seventeenth of December, and go straight to Briarleigh. There was no mention of his wife. The letter—a very brief, sad one—was to Lina, but the fact that he was coming was sufficient. If only death would give up his victim happiness might yet return to FitzCarew.

A few nights after Aline, who was sitting with the invalid, noticed the large black eyes watching her; and oh! joy, there was no longer a feverish glitter in their depths. Very gently Lina took her hand.

"You are better, darling!"

"Who are you?"

"I am Kenneth's sister and yours. You have been very, very ill, but you are getting better now."

"I don't want to get better."

"For his sake."

"He doesn't want me!"

"He does!"

"He is in Africa."

"He is on his way home. He will be at Briarleigh in a fortnight."

"But not here!"

"That won't matter. I am going to take you to Briarleigh as soon as ever you are well enough to travel."

"But your father?"

"Dad wants you too. Do you know, Joan, he was here all the worst part of your illness, and he says if you are given back to us you must be his very own child?"

Joan's eyes filled with tears.

"It sounds as if I would be happy," she said, feebly; "but I can't be—something will happen."

But nothing did. Before the seventeenth of December Aline had taken her sister-in-law home to Briarleigh, very white and languid, but still very lovely. The whole household had fallen in love with Mr. Kenneth's bride, and Joan was speedily installed as the darling of the household. No one had written to tell her husband of her illness, and her arrival at his own home. Aline and Joan both agreed they would surprise him.

"He may not love me," said the girl, who had thought herself heiress of FitzCarew, with a plaintive, wistful truth; "but he will be sorry for me, and let me stay with him when he hears how lonely I am."

So they waited until the very day before the expected arrival of the *Vincent* at Southampton, and then, when every preparation was complete, when in a few hours Kenneth might be with them, a strange fit of melancholy fell on Joan.

"I shall never see him again!" she whispered to Aline. "I shall never hear him say he forgives me!"

"Nonsense!" said that little lady, resolutely. "Kenneth will be here to-morrow—he never disappoints us."

The door opened, and Mr. Ford came in. There was something in his face which struck Joan with terror.

"Something has happened!" she cried. "Oh, father, tell me what it is?"

"My dear child!"

He had meant not to tell her. He had desired to keep it from her, at least until the next day; but the agony on her face, her piteous entreaties, brought out the truth. The good ship *Tamarind* had sunk at sea, and every soul on board had gone down. The news had been brought by a small brig, which had encountered the ill-fated steamer in mid-sea. There was enough of the wreck remaining to leave no doubt of her identity; but not a creature had survived to tell the tale of her loss.

"He will never know I loved him," were the first words which came from Joan's set white lips.

"He knows it now," breathed Aline, through her sobs.

"He can't!" Then she turned to them with passionate self-reproach. "Why don't you send me away? Why don't you turn me from your door? Don't you know it is all my fault—mine? But for my pride and wilfulness he would never have gone to Africa and been drowned in the cruel sea!"

They tried their best to soothe her. They smothered their own grief to comfort hers. They told her she must always stay with them—that she was Kenneth's last legacy to them; but they could avail little, until at last, worn out with emotion, she dropped asleep, a portrait of her husband clasped in her hand.

"Is there no hope?" pleaded Aline, when poor Joan's troubled eyes had closed.

Mr. Ford shook his head.

"None!"

"Kenneth might not have sailed in the *Tamarind*."

"Then he would have written to say so."

"His letter might have been in the mails carried by the *Tamarind* herself."

The old man's brow lightened.

"Then we shall hear to-morrow. On hearing the fate of the *Tamarind* he would telegraph at once."

Oh! how they waited through that day!—how they listened, longingly, for the postman's knock! It came often enough, alas! with notes and telegrams of condolence from all parts, but the cable message which would have brought hope and joy to those troubled hearts was not among them.

There could be no doubt of Kenneth's fate. Everyone accepted it; the household were put into mourning.

Mr. Ford and Aline wore black for him they had held so dear, but Joan absolutely refused to assume the garb of a widow.

"I shall go to him," she said, wistfully. "It was in the Yuletide we met, it was in the Yuletide he was to have been given back to me. He cannot come, but I shall go to him."

She looked so unearthly in her fragile loveliness that they had no heart to cross the fancy.

They could not but see on how frail a thread the young life rested, could not but think it might be even as she said, and her spirit really soon set forth on its journey to meet her husband's, so they let her have her way.

She wore the soft, half mourning she had never quite left off; her beautiful hair, which had all been cut off in the fever, clustered in soft rings round her head, and she looked to them like some beautiful, weary child longing for its rest.

One strange fancy she had. When her wedding-day came round she insisted on being left alone. Mr. Ford and Aline would gladly have stayed with her, but she declared solitude was best, and they must not miss the evening service at the church Kenneth had helped to build.

"It is just a year to-night," she said, as she kissed her sister-in-law; "one little year, and the Yuletide is here again. Perhaps when you come back I shall be with Kenneth."

So they left her in the beautiful drawing-room which she had declared must be decked with evergreens as usual. She lay on a couch in the soft winter firelight, and the old servants, creeping up from time to time to look at her, declared one to the other that her face was already like the face of an angel.

And sleep came to her—sound sleep—not like the fitful, troubled slumbers she had had of late. She was dreaming of her happy childhood at FitzCarew, and so she never heard the sounds of an arrival—of tears and sobs, and explanations. She never knew what had happened until, when she opened her eyes she saw someone standing at her side whom she had thought to see on earth no more.

"Kenneth!"

He bent over her, a world of tenderness in his dark eyes.

"Sweetheart!"

"They said you were dead!" she murmured. "Wasn't it true, or have you come back from spiritland just to hear me say I love you?"

Kenneth said nothing; his heart was too full for speech, only he held his wife's hand as though content had come for him at last.

"They said you would not come!" she whispered, "but I knew better. I knew you would come back to me on our wedding-day."

"And you have wanted me, Joan?"

"I think I have wanted you always," she said, faintly; "ever since—"

"Ever since what, my wife?"

"Ever since you saved my life."

Kenneth stooped down and took her in his arms. For the first time in all their married life he pressed his lips to hers.

"And you will be mine now, Joan," he said, fondly; "mine in deed and truth?"

"Yes; but I don't understand. Have you come back, or have I really gone?"

"Gone where, dear?"

"I was so ill," she said, slowly, "and I always said if you did not come soon I should have gone to you. Have I really gone?"

Kenneth shuddered. He looked at her in an agony of fear. True, she was pale and fragile, as he had never seen her before. There was a beauty not of earth on her lovely face.

"Joan!" he cried, hoarsely, "you must not leave me! I could not bear it! My darling, stay with me!"

"I should like to," she answered, "only I am tired—so very tired and everything looks so far away."

He held her in his arms, pillowed against his heart, as though to fight for her possession inch by inch with death; and her head fell back on his shoulder, as though it had found its true resting-place at last.

So the others found them when they came home and heard the wondrous news.

Aline's supposition was true after all.

Kenneth had written by the *Tamarind* to say that he couldn't sail by her, but should return to England by a vessel due one week later. Being out in mid-ocean at the time the news of the wreck of the *Tamarind* became known, he never knew the fate of that ship or the agony entailed upon his friends. It was only when he reached London that he learned the agony they must be suffering.

So, after all, Joan's prophecy came true. Her husband came back to her in the bright Yuletide, and the two, who had so long been "strangers," yet began a new life together of faith and love.

There are no secrets between them. He knows quite well Joan's folly in those dark autumn days, and how roughly the truth of her parentage was told to her, but even that does not hurt her now. She is contented to owe everything—name, position, wealth—to her husband, of whose life she knows quite well she is the crowning joy.

She never bore the name of Fairfax. Very soon after that happy reunion the old lord died, and Kenneth and his wife took up their places in the great world as Earl and Countess of Linross.

A stately, handsome pair, respected and esteemed by all who know them, their wedded life is noted by all as a model of perfect happiness; but not one of those who cluster round the young Countess, and compliment her on her wit and beauty, know the pride and folly that so nearly ruined her whole life, and was only saved when her husband was given back to her safe and well in the bright Yuletide.



[THE END.]